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CRITICAL HISTORY AND EVALUATION
OF EURIPIDES' BACCHAE

BY
JOHN E. FESTLE, S.J.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

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VITA

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CHAPTER I

CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM: 1842-1893

The decision to put the history of the problem at the beginning of this thesis was not so readily made as it might seem. The beginning is, of course, the natural place to discuss the historical fortunes of the problem a work proposes to solve. But the history of the present problem is so complicated and involved, it is so lacking in a common terminology and approach, that it actually seemed advisable to postpone it until some positive theories of a solution had been proposed in the light of which the many conflicting views of the history might be better presented and understood. However, we shall adhere to the traditional procedure and "...collect the views of our predecessors who had anything to say on the subject, in order that we may adopt what is right in their conclusions and guard against their mistakes."¹

But in order that this procedure be worth our while, we have to unify the varied array of authority and argument. The critics fall naturally into certain classes according to their views. These classes we will mention beforehand. They are the result of a studied sifting of arguments and views, and

¹ Aristotle, περί ψυχης, 403b 20-24.

imply nothing more or less than the common denominators of Bacchic criticism. If this process forces us in some regards to anticipate the positive matter that constitutes the second part of the paper, we shall find ready excuse in the simplification thus rendered possible, relying meanwhile on the positive conclusions later to be reached as an ultimate justification.

For the second half of the paper, too, we shall reserve the definitive statement of what we consider the problem of the Bacchae to be. Here it will suffice to state it in general. Such a statement can take any number of forms: what prompted Euripides to write the play? What did Euripides want the Bacchae to mean to those who saw it presented? How are we to interpret the play? A specification of these general questions brings us closer to the details of the problem. Thus, first of all, was Euripides' interest in the play an intrinsic or extrinsic one? We should say his interest and his motive were intrinsic if we could show that his primary purpose was to present the legend itself, with the intention either of glorifying the god, Bacchus, or of dishonoring him. In this case, the story of Dionysus' entrance into Greece was told for its own sake and not to satisfy an ulterior motive.

But, in the second place, if the poet was prompted to

dramatize the legend for some ulterior motive, we should say his interest was not primarily in the story itself, nor in how true it might be, but rather in the use to which the story might be put, or the signification it might be made to carry. And just as with a so-called intrinsic motive, Euripides intended either to glorify the god or not, so, acting with an ulterior purpose, he might have intended the play either as the "deathbed recantation"² of heterodoxy or orthodoxy, as the case may be. Or, the play might not have been a palinode at all, but a simple and definitive avowal of an old man's lifelong religious platform.

In the course of this critical history of the problem, we shall find that there are reputable classicists within the past century to support each of the above classes. The critics themselves—and this should be evident by the close of the second chapter—furnish the basis for them. This is proof enough that the play does present some knotty problems. Few other cases can be cited where authorities have assumed so many contradictory stands on the same issue.³ Whether or not we have erred on the score of over-simplification will appear from the details of the arguments presently to be

² The phrase is much in vogue among the critics of the Bacchae.

³ The extensive bibliographical appendix in Norwood's The Riddle of the Bacchae is ample evidence of this. Yet this list of twenty-three pages is already forty years old! The present history of the question is thus no more than a sketch of important critical trends.

cited.

One last word on the method to be followed in this critical review of the history of the problem. Where the critics have treated ex professo of the Bacchae, we shall have no difficulty in picking out their opinions. But where the critics' views have been expressed less in particular connection with the Bacchae than as an over-all evaluation of Euripides' life work, some process of deduction and qualification will be necessary. This point is an important one and has a fundamental place in the present thesis. It concerns the relation between the Bacchae and Euripides' life vocation, a problem that will come up for more detailed attention in the second part of the thesis.

Therefore, let us review the authorities of the last century and attempt to group them as we have outline above. This review will be prefaced with a brief survey of Bacchic criticism up to 1842.

Up to the year 1842, critical opinion of the Bacchae, where it was ventured, was with few exceptions unfavorable. In most cases, we are told, the play was dismissed rather summarily as unworthy of more than passing notice.⁴ Hence, we find somewhat to our dissatisfaction that there are many

⁴ H. Patin, Études sur les Tragiques Grecs, "Euripide," Paris, Hachette et Cie, seventh ed., 1894, II, 239 ff.

critical editions of the text of the play, but few attempts to appraise its true meaning. In this year, however, appeared H. Patin's Tragiques Grecs, a three volume study of the major Greek dramatists and their works.⁵ From the publication of the Tragiques Grecs, it will be convenient for us to date a new interest in the Bacchae, not only in France, but also in England. As for Germany, even before this year, German scholars had begun to show interest in the last play of Euripides, attracted especially by the seeming mystery of "rationalism" which it presented.⁶

Before expounding his own interpretation of the Bacchae, Patin takes care to mention briefly the opinions of some prominent French classicists who had written before him. Brumoy, Prévost, La Harpe, and Métastase, are mentioned as among those who did not value the tragedy very highly.⁷ So common was this rejection of the Bacchae at the time Patin wrote, that the opinions of A. W. Schlegel, stand out as a "return to the sentiments of antiquity."⁸ Schlegel and, perhaps, G. H. Meyer,⁹

5 The first edition of this work is not available. All quotations are from the seventh.

6 Cf. Lobeck's words as quoted on p. 24 of this thesis.

7 Patin, 239 ff.

8 Schlegel's praise of the Bacchae is all the more valuable since he is usually reckoned as a detractor of Euripides, especially by Paley, who says that his work, The Greek Theatre, "wants a thorough sweeping out." Cf. F. A. Paley, Euripides with an English Commentary, London, Whittaker and Co., I, ix, n. 9.

9 G. H. Meyer, De Euripidis Bacchabus, Göttingen, 1833. Cf. Pain, 239, n. 13.

were noteworthy in their day for giving the Bacchae the place of importance among Euripides' works that has been almost unanimously accorded by modern critics.

Paley, who published his edition of Euripides' plays from 1857 to 1860, and who is to England in this regard what Patin was to France, also cites Schlegel for his enthusiasm for the Bacchae and obliges us with the German's very words: "Next to the Hippolytus, I would assign to this play [the Bacchae] the first rank among the extant works of Euripides. He adds concerning his contemporaries: "...when modern critics rank this piece very low, I cannot help thinking they do not rightly know what they are about."¹⁰ Thus Schlegel, speaking from Vienna in the first half of the last century, is in agreement with Patin in acknowledging the well-nigh complete indifference of his time to the merits of the Bacchae.

K. O. Müller and C. A. Lobeck are two other German critics of this period who spoke out in favor of the Bacchae. But they, too, are exceptions to the general scholarly trend. Their opinions will be quoted further on.¹¹ They deserve mention here because their words were another indication that the Bacchae was soon to have its day.

¹⁰ A. W. Schlegel, Vorlesungen über dramatischer Kunst und Literatur, Heidelberg, 1817. These lectures were given in Vienna in 1808, and appeared in English in the Bonn Library Edition, 1846. Cf. p. 139. Cf. also Paley, II, 393.

¹¹ Cf. *infra*, p. 24.

Before 1842, in England, apart from some textual editions of Euripides already alluded to, there seems to be little written on the subject of Bacchic interpretation. Thomas Tyrwhitt, it is true, is quoted tirelessly by modern critics as having been one of the first to propose that the Bacchae "...was written to defend Euripides against the charge of impiety which was soon to overwhelm his friend Socrates..."¹² But Tyrwhitt, I believe, who died in 1786, is a prophet much before his time, and is cited more for the sake of completeness than for any influence he might have had in England on the coming reaction.

Patin stands at the head of the modern line of Bacchae enthusiasts. Other examples there are before his time, but because of their isolation they do not mark a turning point. The French critic's first concern when he begins his chapter on the Bacchae in his Tragiques Grecs¹³ is with the subject of the play, the very point that interests us in this history of the problem. His first endeavor is to show that the subject was a natural one for the poet to choose:

Il était naturel qu'à Athènes, où la tragédie était sortie du dithyrambe, où ses représentations étaient restées un des

12 E. R. Dodds, Euripides: Bacchae, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1944, xxxvii.

13 Patin, 233-272.

accessoires du culte de Bacchus, où les acteurs s'appelaient artistes de Bacchus, son théâtre, théâtre de Bacchus, où, sur les murailles du temple voisin de cet édifice, et aussi consacré à Bacchus, étaient peintes les principales aventures du cycle Dionysiaque, l'histoire du dieu fournit beaucoup de sujets aux poètes tragiques.¹⁴

The matter of the legend had been traditional since the time of the Homeric hymns.¹⁵ The subject had been a favorite one with the dithyrambic poets. Thespis, Phrynichus, and then Aeschylus had been inspired by the tale of Dionysus' entrance into Greece. After these a score of secondary dramatists had presented the legend in one form or another on their stages.

It should be quite clear, then, that Euripides' choice of subject should cause no surprise. This was a conclusion which is accepted today, but which was not so evident to the critics of Patin's time. Brumoy, for instance, had been puzzled to think that the poet had lighted on the story of Bacchus, and had some difficulty in accounting for it. He decides finally that the play was a "satire or something of the sort," going so far as to say that after this the presentation of a satire at the Dionysiac festivals became a customary practice.¹⁶

Granted, then, that the piece has this very evident prima facie justification, we can ask whether Euripides' heart was

14 Ibid., 233.

15 Cf. Homeric Hymn VI, "Ad Bacchum."

16 Patin, 237, 8.

in it. Did he desire nothing further than to present the legend, uncritically and without obtruding his own views onto the traditional scenes? Patin does not think so. One thing, however, is certain to him, that Euripides did not wish palpably to vary or to question the facts of the legend or to sift them to his own satisfaction:

Euripide, après Eschyle et d'après lui, composa sa tragédie sur les données de leur nature invariables, en quelque sorte inviolables, soustraites à la libre disposition de l'écrivain, comme aussi au contrôle de la critique...¹⁷

He was presenting the play sous la garde de la religion. We cannot doubt that he shuddered at its cruelty even as the present day reader is tempted to do. But here was a story already immortalized in the imaginations of the Athenians, in paintings and in monument.¹⁸ The artist was forced to respect it though he might well perceive of what shocking and of what unreasonable elements it was composed. Thus, according to Patin, Euripides makes no overt sign that the play does not meet with his official approval.

But are there insinuations which, when carefully attended to, modify this verdict? Yes. Verse 200, for instance, and those following, will come up again and again for comment after Patin has had his say. There is no denying that this passage is the first indication to the listener that the

¹⁷ Ibid., 240.

¹⁸ Cf. Pausanias, Att. XX.

poet does not intend to portray the legend with, as it were, complete passivity. I shall first transcribe the passage and then give Patin's remarks, though he makes his remarks first and immediately afterwards quotes the passage:

Τε. οὐδὲν σοφίζομεθα τοῖσι δαίμοσιν
πατρίους παλαιὰς δόξας ἕς θ' ὀκλήλικας χρόνας
κεκτήμεθ', οὐδέϊς αὐτὰ καταβαλέει λόγος,
οὐδ' εἰ δι' ἄκρων τὸ σοφὸν ἤνρηται φρεσὶν.¹⁹

The evident cue that these lines are not to be taken literally is the fact that Teiresias, whose lines they are, speaks of "traditions as old as time" while Thebes is still a young city. Surely, the ancient prophet speaking in person to the city's founder on the very threshold of the city's history, would not speak of traditions handed down by the Theban forefathers. We are forced to understand these words as spoken not by Teiresias, in whose mouth they are, but by Euripides himself. Patin draws the same conclusion:

Cette situation un peu équivoque, qui fut toujours celle d'Euripide, s'exerçant, avec conviction apparente sur des sujets réprouvés par sa raison, ne semble-t-il pas qu'elle se trahisse dans des paroles qu'il prête à un personnage de ses Bacchantes, mais où c'est lui-même qui s'explique...car il y appelle antiques croyances ce qui précisément s'établit dans sa pièce.²⁰

Let it be understood that we can safely admit that this passage is most significant without, on the other hand,

19 Vv. 200-204. All references to the play are to the Oxford edition, Gilbert Murray, Euripidis Fabulae, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913, II.

20 Patin, 241

submitting to Patin's interpretation of it. This distinction is fundamental in the history of the question. Most of the critics are, indeed, unanimous in citing certain passages in which they believe it is the poet who is speaking to us and not the character into whose mouth the words are actually put. It is quite another matter to determine exactly what the poet means to say.

Patin is definite in the interpretation he gives to this passage, though, unfortunately, he does not go far enough. In it, Euripides tells us that he prefers to believe the truths of religion rather than to question them in the hopes of finding some rational pattern. It is the spirit of Tacitus' Sanctius est ac reverentius de actis deorum credere quam scire.²¹ But these are words that sound as much at home in the mouth of a cynic or sceptic as they do in the mouths of the pious. Hence, we must go to the intention which lies beneath their literal meaning. This is the crux of the question. Nor is the above passage the only one that raises this problem. Others catch Patin's eye in which "...Euripide oppose encore de même, aux témérités sceptiques du libre penser, la docilité de la foi."²² According to Patin, what does the poet really intend by these allusions?

 21 Tacitus, Germania, XXXIV.

22 Patin, 241. Cf. vv. 395, 6; 426 ff; 884ff; 1341 ff.

Par là je ne pense pas qu'il ait l'intention ...de faire une allusion, qui serait peu généreuse, aux irrévérences, chèrement payées, d'Alcibiade; je pense plutôt...qu'il veut se mettre à couvert contre les accusations d'impiété qu'avaient plus d'une fois provoquées ses hardiesses et auxquelles devait bientôt succomber Socrate. Toutefois, dans ces passages mêmes, perçoit son dissentiment. On y aperçoit, ceux du moins qui savent comprendre, qu'il se soumet, sans que sa raison y adhère, à la religion de l'Etat; que, s'adressant à deux sortes d'auditeurs, il parle à la fois et en poète chargé d'exprimer, au milieu de solennités religieuses, sur une scène sainte, les croyances publiques, et en philosophe qui adroitement, prudemment s'en sépare.²³

From the very beginning the atmosphere of the play is a religious one, one that is set on the plane of the miraculous and the supernatural. Into this mood the poet throws himself more freely than he had ever done in any of his other plays. He forgets the usual delight he takes in philosophizing away mythology. This is a drama in which the divinity must have its day, but not so completely as to preclude a few discreet remarks that reveal to those qui savent comprendre the author's feelings of scepticism.²⁴

This is substantially Patin's verdict on Euripides'

- 23 Ibid., 241, 2. He cites Musgrave (cf. infra, n. 46) and Artaud as critics who thought that Euripides had the Alcibiades indictment in mind. But this had taken place more than ten years before. Tyrwhitt and Valckenaer agree with Patin that reference is made to the "charge of impiety, etc." Schoene, too, seems to be in this last group.
 24 Ibid., 242.

purpose in writing the Bacchae. In this last play of his he intends, at least as a poet, to submit himself to the traditions of religion. The principal merit of the Bacchae, as well as its excuse, is this happy expression it gives to the miraculous. Thus Patin gives us what I shall henceforth refer to as the double intention theory. The theory is a distinction between Euripides the philosopher and Euripides the poet. It explains the conflict that arises in a man who writes "...avec conviction apparente sur des sujets réprouvés par sa raison..."²⁵ In the case of the Bacchae this double attitude leads (according to Patin) to an almost complete acquiescence before the truths of religion. That this submission is not entirely complete is evident from a few key passages.

We are not wrong in being disappointed that Patin goes only this far. He ventures no analysis of what Euripides the philosopher really thought of the extravagances of religion. He points out the twofold character of the dramatist yet fails to tell us what was its significance. Was it the character of the poet or of the philosopher that represented Euripides' heart of hearts? And if we answer the latter, as we are inclined to do, there is still the problem of why the

²⁵ Cf. supra, p. 10. There are indications that Schlegel in his Greek Theatre had used such a theory, but Patin seems to be the first to apply it to the Bacchae.

philosopher was sceptical about contemporary religion and what were his positive opinions. Further, Patin believes that by his allusions to the preferability of being docile in matters of faith rather than critical, Euripides hoped to protect himself against charges of impiety. Here is another point on which we should desire elaboration. A few veiled allusions seem poor defense, indeed, for one who knew how true such charges were in his case. But, then, were the charges true? Patin does not tell us.

Though it is true that Patin does not oblige us with answers as ultimate as we might wish, he does pave the way neatly and without prejudice to the issue for more detailed analyses of the Bacchae. His theory of Euripides' double intention, I believe, or a distinction very similar to it, is necessary for a right understanding of the tragedy's meaning. Not that it is given an entirely correct interpretation by Patin himself; but the passages cited by him in this regard cannot be ignored. They must be taken as the reflections of the poet, since they do present a note not consonant with the submissive spirit of the play as a whole.

In summary, Patin has given us every reason to believe that the subject of the Bacchae was one in which Euripides had a real, or, as we have said, an intrinsic interest. Indeed, in the face of so many cogent motives for dramatizing

the subject as Patin details, we are tempted to ask why the poet waited until he was seventy-five to do it. Secondly, Patin has characterized the play by the predominance of the divine and the miraculous. Thirdly, he notes that Euripides maintains an over-all attitude of passivity, both because of the inviolability of the legend and because he did not wish to give grounds to a charge of impiety. Fourthly, Patin develops the theory of double intention by which the philosopher Euripides takes exception to this spirit of complete and unreasoning piety.

There is no doubt that with Paley in England as with Patin in France, we are dealing with another modern pioneer of Bacchic criticism. This becomes distressingly clear when we see how few are the authorities he quotes and realize the meagre contact he has with French and English critics. Paley quotes none of the former. The implication is that he either did not know them or believed their opinions of no value to his purpose. Among the English critics, his favorite seems to be Joshua Barnes, of whom we need say no more than that he died in 1712, almost a century and a half before the publication of Paley's edition of Euripides. This edition came out from 1857 to 1860.²⁶ Its avowed purpose is to supersede the works of the old Porsonian school of critics

²⁶ Cf. *supra*, n. 8.

whose efforts, according to Paley, yielded only "dull and dry annotation."²⁷ His own evaluation of Euripides, especially when compared with that of Patin, is too sketchy and underdeveloped to deserve much of our attention.

The editors of Paley's time and after him, Sandys and, with some qualification, Tyrrell, were very much attached to the vision of an orthodox Euripides who gave the Bacchae from his deathbed as a pledge of this orthodoxy. Paley is the first of the English critics to enunciate the "palinode" theory:

The Bacchae is especially remarkable for exhibiting clearly and prominently the theological opinions of the poet in his latter days... Human reason and philosophy had entirely failed him. Disbelieving as he had long done, the popular theology, he had found no satisfaction in his unbelief. Something was yet wanting to his thoughtful and naturally devout mind; and he was, probably, struck with the joyous buoyancy of a worship, which in form at least was new to him.²⁸

This opinion of the peculiar character of the Bacchae is not easily squared with the remarks Paley makes in the general preface to his three volumes. We look in vain for a definite description of the "unbelief" from which the Bacchae was a reversion; or for evidences of the complete reliance the poet

²⁷ Ibid., I, lii. Monk, Elmsley, and Pflugk, are the Porsonians Paley has in mind. Hermann is the only editor before him to come in for a word of approval.

²⁸ Ibid., II, 392.

formerly had put on "human reason and philosophy." Paley is careful to paint the Euripides of the former plays in general terms, neither as an outright iconoclast nor as a crusader whose purpose was a constructive, not a destructive one. Hence, it is difficult to see exactly from what the Bacchae proved a conversion, and this we should like very much to know.

Anyway, the Euripides of the earlier plays was not a complete atheist. "His object seems to have been to lead men to a higher and sublimer contemplation and worship of the one great Mind, or Being, or Intelligence, who is the author and creator of all existing things."²⁹ Paley gives his approval to the theory of double intention which we have already mentioned as originated by Schlegel and developed by Patin. But Paley, following the lead of Müller, adds to this theory by postulating a tension that must have arisen from the conflict between the poet's true opinions and those expressed in the matter of his plays.³⁰ Thus, the fundamental theory of the double intention finds its way into the English tradition, though Paley in adopting it takes no note of Patin's having done the same fifteen years before.

Patin had applied the theory to the Bacchae. Paley does

29 Ibid., I, xxiii.

30 Ibid., xx-xxi.

not. He passes by the verses which most proponents of the double intention theory never tire of quoting.³¹ For him, the one purpose of the theory seems to be to illustrate the tension between the poet and the philosopher which is finally resolved in favor of the poet. This resolution, we are forced to suppose, is what led Euripides to give us the Bacchae, the play in which he declares himself now in the number of the faithful, no longer a sophist and a sceptic who is willing to follow in matters of religion only the guidance of his own reason.³² Paley's final verdict, then, is that Euripides' interest is a genuinely religious one and in the play itself. There is not even the suggestion of an ulterior purpose as there was with Patin. The Bacchae is simply a sign to us of the poet's conversion.

Tyrrell and Sandys are right in the English tradition of the second half of the last century.³³ They ignore the French and quote the Germans, and only in Tyrrell is even the least mention given to Paley despite the fact that the theories he held and which he brought into the English tradition are cited at length. Tyrrell, we must remark

³¹ Vv. 200, etc. Cf. supra, n. 22.

³² Paley, I, xxv.

³³ Tyrrell's first edition was in 1870. Many of the opinions expressed in it are altered in the newer edition of 1892. Hence, I have used this latter in its 1910 reprint. This is the reason I have treated Sandys first.

immediately, is not strictly in the palinode tradition. However, he will be classed with those who were. The Bacchae for him has the same intrinsic signification as it had for Paley and later for Sandys. It was a sample of good orthodoxy. The difference in Tyrrell's theory lies in the fact that he considered Euripides to be orthodox his whole life long. Hence, the Bacchae represented no notable change. These are the grounds on which we say that he is akin to those who hold the palinode theory.

There is not much new in Sandys' edition and interpretation of the Bacchae.³⁴ As I have said, he ignores Paley, even Patin, and about his only concern seems to be to gather the German opinions before his day, sift them, and pronounce his own verdict. With regard to method, though, he makes what I believe a useful contribution. In our examination of the text of the play, he advises us to look for the poet's sentiments especially in the odes.³⁵ These he adds will contain the poet's words when they are not entirely in keeping with the sentiments which might naturally have been expected from a band of Asiatic women. He then proceeds to give examples of the verses in the Bacchae where

34 John Edwin Sandys, The Bacchae of Euripides, Cambridge University Press, 1880.

35 Ibid., lxxii ff. Here he also gives reasons for rejecting the notorious vv. 200 ff. as the words of Euripides.

this is true.³⁶ This rule of thumb is sufficiently commonplace with regard to the other dramatists. In Euripides, however, it must be applied with special caution if we are to avoid self-deception. The lead Sandys gives us is worth while, and we shall make use of it in our positive exposition.

Here we can make an important general observation. The greater the use that is made of the double intention theory, the more we approach an ulterior motive for the Bacchae. This does not seem to be necessarily true, but as a matter of fact we find the principle verified in the critics. We have already seen examples of their distinguishing two persons in Euripides, that of the poet and that of the philosopher. The more the emphasis on this cleavage and the greater the cleavage is made to appear, so much the more are we led to say Euripides' interest in the play was extrinsic. Patin had already a suggestion of this trend when he selected certain verses in which the poet speaks directly to us, supposedly to anticipate charges of impiety. His emphasis on the cleavage is very light. Paley speaks of the tension that must be resolved between the poet and the philosopher. To carry his theory through to the end, he should have pointed out that the poet himself was conscious of this conversion

 36 E.g., vv. 395, 427, 1002, 398, et al.

to such an extent that his main intention in the Bacchae was to signalize it to the public. In general, we can say that when this conflict is more deliberately emphasized, the poet is less likely to be interested in the play for its own sake. It could be otherwise, of course, but does not seem to be so.

With Sandys, the trend towards this separation according to the double intention theory grows more perceptible. He is the first to lay down a definite method by the use of which we can determine when it is the poet who is speaking and when it is not. Thus can we ferret out the "indications of a less obvious kind pointing to an ulterior purpose" that Sandys speaks of in his introduction:

On a superficial view, it might appear that the object of the play is nothing more than the glorification of the god whose worship was intimately connected with the origin and development of the Greek drama; but a more careful examination shews that there are also indications of a less obvious kind, pointing to an ulterior purpose.³⁷

But "careful examinations" can be carried to extremes especially when the examiner has preconceived notions of what he expects to find. It will not be long after Sandys that we meet the conspicuous example of a careful but prejudiced examiner in the person of A. W. Verrall. He represents the extreme application of the double intention theory. Hence,

³⁷ Sandys, lxxiii. The underlines are mine.

according the principle just expressed some validity, we find that it is he who attributes to the poet a motive most fantastically ulterior.

For Sandys, the Bacchae is a palinode, an apology. In those verses where we see that it is really the poet who is speaking, we find "denunciations of τὸ σοφόν."³⁸ This is "the pupil of Anaxagoras" talking to us. Euripides by this denunciation wants us to know that he has finally abandoned his career of scepticism and doubt. The old religion does not deserve to be carped and cavilled at. The Bacchae, therefore,

...may be regarded as in some sort an apologia and an eirenicon, or as, at any rate, a confession on the part of the poet that he was fully conscious that, in some of the simple legends of the popular faith, there was an element of sound sense which thoughtful men must treat with forbearance, resolving on using it, if possible, as an instrument for inculcating a truer morality, instead of assailing it with a presumptuous denial.³⁹

What are the more detailed implications of the denunciation or to what, exactly, it referred, Sandys does not say. We must add on our own that it must not be thought that Euripides, by his denunciation of τὸ σοφόν, is going over to the side of a blind and unreasoning faith in the old

³⁸ Ibid., lxxiv ff.

³⁹ Ibid., lxxv-lxxvi.

religion. That would be as much a mistake as to think that he was at the other extreme, the sophistry and scepticism of his contemporaries. As Tyrrell will soon point out to us, there is rationalizing and there is rationalizing. The carping, sophistical type was what Euripides meant to condemn in the Bacchae, not the kind necessary if belief was to be purified. Sandys in the last quotation foreshadows this essential distinction when he speaks of the core of truth in popular belief which the poet resolved to use as "an instrument for inculcating a truer morality."

This is the first hint, as far as I can see, among the English critics, that Euripides had a didactical purpose.⁴⁰ In the positive part of this thesis, much will be made of this didacticism in so far as it was constructive. Euripides meant to purify belief, not to destroy it. In this second regard, then, we can also be grateful to Sandys. If the philosopher Euripides ever does obtrude himself into the plays, it is with this purpose of offering to the Athenians a belief more worthy of them.

Following the example of Sandys, it would be well for us here to record briefly the chief points of the history

⁴⁰ Paley, I, xii, had said that Euripides was out to teach the Athenians, but the meaning of this is moralizing rather than didacticism.

of the theory that says the Bacchae is an apologia. Tyrwhitt and Schoene, who have already been mentioned,⁴¹ are among its first proponents. Only with Lobeck, however, do we see attributed to Euripides a definite polemical purpose so that the apologia takes on an aggressive character. The play, for instance, was against the rationalists; for Lobeck says of it:

Dithyrambi quam tragoediae similior, totaque ita comparata, ut contra illius temporis Rationalistas scripta videatur, qua et Bacchicarum religionum sanctimonia commendatur, et rerum divinarum disceptatio ab eruditorum iudiciis ad populi transfertur suffragia...⁴²

K. O. Müller holds, too, that in the Bacchae not only was Euripides converted to the status of a positive believer, but also that he took the offensive in the people's behalf:

In this play he appears, as it were, converted into a positive believer, or, in other words, convinced that religion should not be exposed to the subtleties or reasoning; that the understanding of man cannot subvert traditions as old as time; that the philosophy which attacks religion is but a poor philosophy, and so forth...⁴³

Musgrave is another link in the apologia tradition in that he holds, similarly to Patin, that Euripides wanted to forestall charges of impiety.⁴⁴ Though the two terms have been used

41 Cf. supra, p. 7 and p. 12, n. 23.

42 C. A. Lobeck, Aglaophamus, Königsberg, 1829, 623.

43 K. O. Müller, A History of the Literature of Ancient Greece (transl. by G. G. Lewis and J. W. Donaldson), London, Longmans, I, 499.

44 Samuel Musgrave, Edition of Euripides, Oxford, 1778. Cf. comment on v. 200.

almost interchangeably thus far, we should state explicitly that in this matter the palinode and apologia theories come to about the same thing. The poet is seen as showing a "desire to put himself right with the public in matters on which he had been misunderstood."⁴⁵ What discrepancy there is between the two notions is a reflection of the foggy with which most critics have treated the whole matter.

The palinode theory met with opposition not so much because of what it claimed was Euripides' final stand on religion, as for stipulating that this final stand was a reversal of the opinions of the greater part of his life. Hartung believed that in the Bacchae the moral attitude of the poet had not changed at all.⁴⁶ This opinion was adopted by another German, Eduard Pfander,⁴⁷ and brought into the English tradition by Tyrrell.⁴⁸ Both of these thought that there was not "...any change in the point of view from which Euripides regards the old gods of the heathen mythology."⁴⁹

We will recall that Sandys' main reason for adjudging

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- 45 Sandys, lxxxi. Though there are real differences, he uses the terms almost interchangeably, and there is tacit admission of this when in conclusion he says the play "was not so much a formal palinode.
- 46 J. A. Hartung, Euripides Restitutus, Hamburg, 1844, II, 542.
- 47 Eduard Pfander, Über Euripides Bacchen, Berne, 1868, 2.
- 48 R. Y. Tyrrell, The Bacchae of Euripides, London, Macmillan, 1910.
- 49 Ibid., xxxi.

the Bacchae a palinode was the repeated condemnations he found in it of τὸ λογόν, which rightly is taken to mean "rationalization." But Tyrrell a few years later blames Sandys and those of his school for not distinguishing between constructive and destructive rationalization. Relying on this distinction, Tyrrell opposes the palinode theory and claims that the poet's beliefs were consistent unto death:

It is the neglect of this distinction between the Sophistic and Euripidean points of view which has fostered the opinion that the Bacchae is a recoil from the Aufklärung of his earlier works, and a reaction towards a dogmatic orthodoxy; whereas in truth the rationalism which he condemns in the Bacchae is the rationalism of the Sophistic standpoint, and that he condemns in the Medea and the Hippolytus, written thirty years before; and the rationalism of his earlier works is the Socrato-Euripidean rationalism of which clear traces may be found in the Bacchae, the work of the poet's extreme age.⁵⁰

Thus Tyrrell believes that all life long, as finally in the Bacchae, Euripides advocated a constructive rationalism.

We will bring this chapter to a close by pointing out what is of value in the opinions we have just examined. For the present, the norm by which we shall judge will be the unanimity with which critics agree on certain basic consider-

50 Ibid., xli-xlii. But even Tyrrell sees an accidental advance in the Bacchae. It is a concession to Sandys, that in this play Euripides solves his old problem, "the reconciliation of the existence of a benevolent providence with the imperfection of the moral government of the world." Cf. ibid., xlii.

ations. The first common denominator which we cannot afford to overlook is the double intention theory. Patin, Paley, Sandys, and most of the German critics used it to support their varying conclusions. We cannot ignore the theory nor the certain lines that substantiate it as a reliable means of discovering the true meaning of the Bacchae. We will endeavor to make use of it later in the positive matter and attempt to trace a constant motif in those various lines. Sandys, as the reader will recall, recommended the odes, too, as an additional source of utterances that were strictly those of the poet. In connection with this theory, a general principle was enunciated, namely, that the more the theory has been invoked, the closer the critic seems to approach to an ulterior purpose for the Bacchae. Sandys and some of the Germans were cited as evidence of this increasing emphasis; yet, because they relied only moderately on the theory, we did not attempt to group them definitely either in the intrinsic or in the extrinsic interest classes.

The second point of importance involves the disagreement about Euripides' thought up to the time of the Bacchae. The critics agree with various qualifications that the play in itself is orthodox, but for the majority of them final orthodoxy for Euripides meant the reversal of a lifelong stand. Tyrrell with the distinction we have already

mentioned opposed this view and reasoned that the Bacchae was in keeping with the poet's dramatic purpose as evidenced in the pre-Bacchae works. All agree that in the Bacchae we have indications of a special purpose which may have been a desire to square himself with public opinion, or any other of the purposes suggested. Anyway, to settle the problem of the Bacchae, it is imperative to determine just what was Euripides' purpose in criticizing the gods and the mythology of his time. According to this decision, we shall be able to determine whether the Bacchae was palinode or climax. The question of Euripides' life policy is a consideration which the critics thus far have passed over rather summarily. In this second regard, then, we can profit from their omission.

These, I believe, are the two conspicuous benefits to be derived from this critical review of nineteenth century critics. Attention to these points cannot help but bring us closer to a correct solution of the problem of the Bacchae.

CHAPTER II

CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM: 1893-1913

With the beginning of the twentieth century, Euripidean criticism takes on a more substantial character.¹ Many of the deficiencies which we had occasion to lament in the evaluations of the previous century disappear. The improvement that strikes one most favorably is the fact that critics are beginning to spend more of their time on the life of Euripides in general. Those especially who treat of the Bacchae recognize the importance of one of the points made in the last chapter, namely, that the poet's last play must be viewed in the light of his whole life's work. Hence, they are increasingly at pains to discover a common purpose in all of Euripides' writings.

Although Decharme published his work, Euripide et l'Esprit de son Théâtre,² seven years before the end of the

1 In this century our interest is mainly in the work of Decharme, Norwood, Verrall, Murray, Grube, and Dodds. Cf. bibliography for complete list of the period's important works.

2 Paul Decharme, Euripide et l'Esprit de son Théâtre, Paris, Garnier Frères, 1893. A translation into English appeared in 1906: James Loeb, Euripides and the Spirit of his Dramas, New York, Macmillan. The fact that only one section of Decharme is being considered should not seem to deny the numerous other merits of his work.

nineteenth century, he deserves to be ranked among those who take a broader view of the dramatist's work. He devotes only four pages of his book to special criticism of the Bacchae, delaying barely long enough to tell us that he disagrees with the view that makes the Bacchae a palinode.³ What we appreciate most in his approach to Euripides are not special theories about the play itself, but rather the entire chapter which he devotes to a discussion of the playwright's criticism of mythological legend and the doubts he expressed in matters religious.⁴

Now, before presenting Decharme's views on this subject, we shall do well to point out their pertinence to the present paper. This should not be difficult. We have already agreed that we must know something about Euripides' life purpose if we are to determine his purpose in the Bacchae. But is it not evident that the Bacchae is a religious play? Whether it was sincerely and integrally so, or merely the vehicle for certain religious views of the poet, does not matter. We can agree from simply reading the play that it is inextricably bound up with religion. The play represents the introduction into Greece of one of the popular religious cults of the day.⁵ All the critics thus far, especially

3 Decharme, 87 ff.

4 Ibid., 64-93.

5 Bacchae, vv. 13-22, et al.

Patin and those who followed him, are frank in acknowledging that first place on the score of poetry is given to the lyric enthusiasm of the votaries of Dionysus.⁶ Only a critic who was wilfully blind could deny the outstanding religious character of the Bacchae, and only an obscurant would claim that it was unimportant to establish the nature of the author's religious views if we are going to interpret the Bacchae correctly. Hence, when Decharme decided to dwell much longer than his predecessors on this aspect of Euripidean criticism, he was merely recognizing the importance of a need which was in itself evident, and which had eventually to be supplied.

One more fact besides the religious importance of Euripides' work is taken for granted by Decharme. It is that Euripides was a confirmed critic. Was this gratuitously assumed by Decharme? I think not. His predecessors had all acknowledged the fact that either in a mild or in a vehement way, Euripides had some special purpose as a dramatist. We have already mentioned this fact and the distinction that Tyrrell made in the same regard. And so Decharme says:

Les mythes sont la matière même de la
tragédie. Il n'était point permis à
Euripide, poète tragique, de les révoquer

⁶ Patin, 244: "Ce qui caractérise cette pièce, c'est l'inspiration lyrique, dithyrambique qui y domine." He adds that this alone would explain the play's popularity.

en doute, d'en suspecter d'une façon générale de réalité. Mais, s'il n'eut jamais l'imprudence de dire que les traditions qui composent la trame de ses pièces sont purement fabuleuses, il ne s'est pas fait scrupule d'exprimer son scepticisme au sujet d'autres légendes qu'il rencontrait sur son chemin.⁷

The scepticism that Decharme discusses is another obvious element in most of Euripides plays.⁸ Whether he indulges this scepticism with a constructive purpose or not, we shall discover shortly, but there is no denying its presence.⁹

Nor is Euripides by any means the only example in his day of such a spirit of doubt. Many of the philosophers such as Xenophanes, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras, had expressed themselves along the same lines.¹⁰ But, "...l'esprit de doute, pour se propager, aura besoin de la voix des poètes."¹¹ Euripides was just this voice. The people were

7 Decharme, 64. Underlines mine.

8 We pass no judgment yet about scepticism in the Bacchae itself. Sufficient examples can be found in the other plays, e.g., Helena, vv. 17-21, where with the words, ἐὶ αἰφνης οὗτος λόγος, the poet casts doubt on the legend of the birth of Helen and the Dioscuri. Cf. also Electra, vv. 737-8; et al.

9 We have not taken the trouble to point out this universal admission in the critics reviewed in the first chapter. However, it can be said that all of them spoke of it explicitly or made it a presupposition of their theories, that Euripides all his life played the part of a critic.

10 Even Aeschylus in Eumenides, v. 612, had said that Zeus contradicts himself. Cf. Decharme, 61-2: "Les hardiesses religieuses d'Eschyle ont donc précédé les hardiesses sceptiques d'Euripide..."

11 Decharme, 60-1.

prepared to hear even in the theatre criticism of their gods and their religion.¹²

Was Euripides then merely gratifying the appetite of his audience for a string of clever sophisms when he expressed himself so sceptically? Decharme says no:

S'il rejette, comme invraisemblables ou comme immorales, un certain nombre de fables de la mythologie courante, ce n'est pas pour la vain plaisir d'innover, en critiquant des traditions généralement acceptées; c'est parce que ces fables lui paraissent inconciliables avec l'idée qu'on devrait se faire de la divinité.¹³

His norm of criticism was not personal whim. He had a definite idea of what was becoming to a deity, and he was afraid that the common people, if they did not share this ideal, would try to justify their immorality by the examples of the gods. This sophism the poet did his best to prevent by exposing those unworthy tales to doubt.¹⁴

We need not agree on the particulars of Decharme's theory of a constructive purpose for the poet's scepticism, but, I think, we shall be forced to admit the validity of the theory in general. Its final claim to acceptance, of

12 This is what Decharme says, though we may suspect him of oversimplification. Were the Athenians ready for such criticism? Anaxagoras and Protagoras had been exiled for ἀρε βία, and Socrates was to be put to death on the same charge.

13 Ibid., 77.

14 Ibid., 75-6.

course, must rest on the facts; but since, as we shall see, these facts find the same interpretation by twentieth century critics, we may take the matter as well-nigh settled.

Verrall and Norwood will raise the only dissenting voices in this regard. Otherwise, there is almost unanimity on the fact that Euripides' public scepticism had a constructive turn. Haigh phrases this belief perhaps more clearly than Decharme, when he writes:

He was conscious of the value of the established religion, but desires like Pindar before him, and Plato after him, to purify it of its grosser elements; and it is not against the existence of the gods, as against the cruelty and immorality ascribed to them, that his attacks are mainly directed.¹⁵

One certain text must be cited here in this connection. It is probably the most worn of its class when the question of Euripides' religious views is raised. The verse is usually taken to characterize the ethic of the poet's criticism of the gods:

εἰ θεοὶ γὰρ ἦσαν αἰσχροὶ, οὐκ εἶσιν θεοὶ

The poet is alleged to have formulated most of this constructive scepticism of his according to this norm. Such a rule might

¹⁵ A. E. Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1896, 268-9. Cf. also, 262-9, passim.

¹⁶ August Nauck, Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta, Leipzig, Teubner, 1889, fragm. 292. Cf. Also Decharme's comment, 76.

be said to be the answer he gave to the poet, Pindar, when the latter said that man should say nought unseemly of the gods.¹⁷

What in particular were the aims of this constructive policy, we shall attempt to discover later when treating the Bacchae. Then, too, we will propose for the sake of completeness other possible explanations of his career of criticism.

In publishing his new volume on Euripides, Decharme had a simple and straightforward purpose.¹⁸ He desired to bring Euripidean criticism up to date, to keep it abreast of new discoveries in the world of archaeology, and to take advantage of new insights into the poet's genius. But two years after Decharme, we meet with the work of A. W. Verrall, another classicist much interested in the work of Euripides. Verrall's method, however, was a violent contrast to the calm and orthodox procedure of Decharme. With him the theories of the poet's "rationalism" were pushed to the extreme. Looking back now over the years between, we might venture to say that, if ~~these~~ theories had been accepted by the scholarly world, it would have proved the kiss of death for Euripides as a dramatist.

¹⁷ Pindar, Olympian I, 35 (55).

¹⁸ Cf. Decharme, I-IV.

Paley once wrote that "...it has been the fate of Euripides, if he has had many warm friends, also to have met with some bitter enemies."¹⁹ This saying found ironical fulfillment in the coming of Verrall. He approaches the poet as a friend, but with the initial supposition that all of Euripides' former friends had been wrong to evaluate him as they did:

The right view of Euripides, and the capacity of understanding him, is a thing which we moderns have yet to recover; and our only way is to begin with recognizing that somewhere in our notions about the poet there must be something fundamentally wrong.²⁰

These words are to be found at the beginning of his first work on the plays of Euripides. Only fifteen years later, in 1910, did he finally publish in book form his theories on the Bacchae.²¹ This was two years after Norwood's The Riddle of the Bacchae,²² and most of the views expressed therein by Norwood were accepted and endorsed by Verrall.

We shall couple Verrall and Norwood together in this critical parade because they belong together. Verrall formulated a new general approach to the work of Euripides, and

¹⁹ Paley, I, viii.

²⁰ A. W. Verrall, Euripides the Rationalist, Cambridge University Press, 1895, 1-2.

²¹ A. W. Verrall, The Bacchants of Euripides, Cambridge University Press, 1910.

²² Gilbert Norwood, The Riddle of the Bacchae, Manchester University Press, 1908.

began to apply it to several of the plays, but not immediately to the Bacchae. Norwood aligned himself with Verrall and others who advocated a rationalistic interpretation of Euripides' plays, and tried his hand at a new interpretation of the Bacchae in this spirit. Hence, in Verrall and Norwood we find combined a critical approach that is complete, an approach that puts emphasis on Euripides' life vocation and personality as well as on the meaning to be given to particular plays. The two considerations are not separated by this school, and though we must deny the extremism of their conclusions, we must admit and emulate the wisdom of their method.

In this critical history, our main concern will be to present the views of this school as set forth by Norwood in the Riddle.²³

The mystery of the Bacchae is certainly bound up with an attitude toward religion.²⁴ This is the starting-point of Norwood's theory. We certainly cannot take exception to it since we have already stated along with Decharme that the character of the play is primarily a religious one.

 23 For this purpose Norwood's Greek Tragedy, Boston, John W. Luce & Co., Inc., 1928, will be used collaterally since in it Norwood modifies some of the rationalist views set down in the Riddle.

24 Norwood, Riddle, 1-7.

Here Norwood is on common ground with all the other critics. It is in his interpretation of just how the play is religious that he differs so much. Euripides, according to Norwood, is interested in religion only in so far as it reveals the psychology of the human heart.²⁵ Others of the critics thought that he was interested in religion as such and that he believed in it to a certain extent.

Does this view of religion also mean that Euripides disbelieved the traditional mythology and theology? Absolutely yes. And so convinced and total was this disbelief that one of the main purposes of the Bacchae was to persuade the people of the irrationality of their religious beliefs:

He became convinced that the moral standard had deteriorated owing to belief in stories which asserted the imperfections of the gods. ...This is the importance of the famous line εἰ θεοὶ τι δρώσι ἀδύνατον, οὐκ εἶναι θεοὶ; the enlightened Greek will no longer look to the gods as the source of right, but will criticise them from the point of view to which he has attained by strenuous thinking and by experience of life.²⁶

There is no longer any place for faith. Reason must take the helm and decide whether the gods as they have been presented by traditional mythology are worthy of rational credence. But does Norwood believe that such a platform

25 Norwood, Greek Tragedy, 318 ff.

26 Norwood, Riddle, 8-9.

meant complete disbelief, or is it merely a position of constructive criticism as outlined by Decharme?

In answering this question a distinction must be made. There is no doubt in Norwood's mind that Euripides had no faith in the existence of the gods. But was the criticism of which we have evidence in his plays meant to convey this to the general multitude? No.

...Euripides did criticise the Olympian hierarchy and made no secret of it. That was enough, no doubt, to scandalise the orthodox, but few of them were likely to regard the criticism of which the poet generally delivered himself as an attack on the very existence of the gods. He himself might feel that to say "Athena is a bad goddess" was tantamount to saying "there is no goddess Athena," but most of his hearers would only think he had insulted Athena, and would be shocked or diverted according to their own turn of mind. On the higher spirits on both sides would see the gravity of the position to which criticism led.²⁷

Euripides, then, himself saw that his scepticism meant total disbelief, and a certain circle of intellectuals, too, would perceive the inevitable conclusion. But to the masses of the people, he would not discover the extremity of his position. The poet would be content if their ideas of his real stand were somewhat befogged and indefinite. He would

27 Ibid., 10.

take only the select few into his confidence.²⁸

And from these premises the whole theory of the rationalism of Euripides is constructed. His real message was for the few. The many were to be accorded only a glimpse of it. Hence, he would have to have some vehicle of this studied esotericism. Thus does the school of rationalists invoke a double intention theory to show how the poet delivered his message to the many and to the few. We shall examine its application to the Bacchae.

No theory can be applied arbitrarily to a drama. There must be justification in the play itself before we are warranted in availing ourselves of the use of this or that device as an aid in the play's interpretation. Hence, we see that the other critics who have employed the theory of double intention were led to this expedient by the impossibility of interpreting certain lines in any other way. What is the clue that leads Norwood to invoke such a theory? The unique fact that leads Norwood to suspect a double intention is the "palace-miracle."

Norwood, and Verrall with him, believes that the palace-miracle is not a miracle at all. Reference is made to vv.

 28 Later Norwood explicitly differentiates Euripides' position from that of Aeschylus who saw an alternative to the throwing over of traditional religion, namely that of reforming it from the inside. Cf. ibid., 10-11.

632, ff., where Dionysus says:

πρὸς δὲ τοῦτοδ' αὐτῷ τὰδ' ἄλλα Βάκχοις λυμάνεται·
δῶκετ' ἔρρηξεν χαμάζε· συντεθράνωται δ' ἅπαν

These lines from the disguised Dionysus' speech, Norwood takes to mean that the whole palace of Pentheus has by a miracle been razed to the ground. His difficulty, then, is the fact that the miracle is acknowledged by no one of the other characters in the play:

The facts are, that the chorus cry aloud at the tottering of the building; that Dionysus a moment later when relating what has happened within adds, "And this further evil hath Bacchus wrought upon him: he hath flung his dwelling to the ground, where it lies all in ruin"; that, finally, the palace is as a fact uninjured. This latter point is proved by the complete silence of all the personages, except Dionysus and the chorus...Above all, Pentheus who was in the house when the overthrow is alleged to have occurred, says nothing about it...It follows that the statements made by the chorus and by Dionysus are untrue...Only one power can work this marvel of belief—hypnotism, or, as earlier ages would call it, magic. The Dionysus of this play is precisely what Pentheus calls him, a "foreign wizard" (γῶης ἐπωδός), no god at all, but a human hierophant of the new religion.²⁹

"These damaging facts make it imperative to examine the god's position and conduct afresh."³⁰ We must reread the play in the light of this discovery.

²⁹ Norwood, Greek Tragedy, 281-2. Cf. also, Riddle, 37-48.
³⁰ Norwood, Riddle, 49. Later on, we shall give the modern critics' answer to the difficulty of the palace-miracle.

What is the meaning of Dionysus if he is not truly a god? All the other critics have accepted him as such, no one of them has questioned his divinity, however he may have thought the poet intended to make use of it. But in the rationalists' theory we have to account for Euripides' making a mere magician the central character of a very moving tragedy. What dramatic significance does the character of Dionysus bear?

For Norwood, Dionysus is the personal representation of a necessary force in human emotions, a craving born within us, "...a permanent fact of life personified."³¹ This is how the Bacchae comes to be a study in the psychology of the human heart. The figure of Dionysus is ideal. It represents the craving for religion in all of the Athenian hearts, and it also shows to what disastrous results such a craving, if suppressed and opposed, can lead. Thus the play has a prima facie or superficial meaning for the many; an esoteric meaning for the few. Both meanings were intended by Euripides, but only the second adequately represented his true mind:

Take this play in its superficial meaning and you find a person who is detestable—a god who does wrong, and who is, therefore, no god at all. Away with

³¹ Norwood, Greek Tragedy, 284.

him; purify your theology. And when this is done, we find, not that the drama has fallen to pieces, but that now it is coherent and forcible. There is in the human soul an instinct for ecstasy, for a relinquishment of self in order to feel and bathe in the non-human glory of Nature. Trample this instinct ruthlessly down as did Pentheus, and your life is maimed and shrivelled.³²

Evidently, Norwood applied the double intention theory somewhat differently from the earlier critics. For his predecessors, the play had no complete, real meaning unless the double intention were completely understood. But for Norwood, there is a complete and plausible interpretation apart from the double intention theory. True, such a signification is leveled at the majority, and is not the genuine mind of Euripides himself. This distinction on the part of the rationalists leaves us with a definite theory of the play even if we do feel forced to reject all the implications of a bogus miracle. Norwoods admits this possibility:

Then why does the poet dwell on the personal existence of Dionysus? Even if we refuse to believe the theory already outlined, that this person is a human hierophant, we can still answer the question. Euripides is concerned not merely to tell us the truth about ethics, but to discuss the current theology of his day.³³

32 Ibid., 284-5.

33 Ibid., 284.

What lessons in theology the poet had to teach were best expressed in the exhortation, "Purify your theology." Such a recommendation sounds very much akin to the theory of Decharme with which we have shown sympathy, until we remind ourselves what the rationalists believe to be the true mind of Euripides. But, eventually, mutatis mutandis, Norwood's opinion of the poet's message to the multitude will be adduced in support of our own evaluation, the only difference being that we shall say that it represents the genuine constructive intent of the poet.³⁴

That Euripides was out to undermine all belief in any kind of supernatural is the conclusion to which we must reduce the rationalists. We shall not enter here into the reasons why he was not more blatant and less devious in his attack. According to them the dramatist had no real religious faith whatsoever. They get the name of rationalists from the alleged process by which the poet is said subtly and almost imperceptibly to rationalize away the orthodoxy of his day. From myth, Verrall says, the dramatist by insinuation, by double entendre, meant to excise the "divine, or pseudo-divine elements. This is the process known as 'rationalizing';

³⁴ In a review of Verrall's first work, J. R. Mozley says that he "...pushes a certain premiss, which in a degree is sound, up to a point at which it becomes paradoxical." Cf. J. R. Mozley, "Verrall's Euripides the Rationalist," The Classical Review, vol. IX (1895), 407.

and accordingly Dr. Verrall entitles his volume Euripides the Rationalist."³⁵ The actual devices of rationalization become evident only after close attention to plots and speeches.

The rationalization theory by its very obscurity prompts those who hope for a new and more plausible evaluation of the Bacchae to hit upon a meaning for the play that is not quite so masked and cloaked as that of the rationalists seems to be.

This theory as elaborated by Norwood in the Riddle "has met with much scepticism, but received the honour of almost entire acceptance"³⁶ by Verrall. This last agrees, too, that prima facie, by a process "brief, instinctive, and irresistible,"³⁷ we conclude that Euripides himself believes in Dionysus and wishes to confirm the belief of others in him. But a closer examination reveals that we have deceived ourselves in accepting too readily what appears to be self-evident. Once again, we must remark that it is far more desirable to rest with the obvious meaning of a play than to seek one that is not so obvious. This is especially true if the second can be proved false

³⁵ Ibid., 408.

³⁶ Norwood, Greek Tragedy, 281.

³⁷ Verrall, The Bacchantes, 14.

and unnecessary. We hope to do just that in the case of the extreme rationalists. However, we shall not be so hasty as to reject without consideration meanings which they and many others admit have almost immediate claim to the reader's acceptance.

Writing about three years after Norwood and Verrall, Gilbert Murray does not seem to take their bizarre theories too seriously.³⁸ Though he is anxious to acknowledge the rationalists' ingenuity in interpreting Euripides,³⁹ he is also quite sure that Dionysus is truly a god, and that the Bacchae is "a heartfelt glorification" of him.⁴⁰ Since Murray's work is for popular consumption, he does not venture into a minute consideration of the play, but contents himself with several valuable observations on Euripides' attitude toward religion as evidenced in the Bacchae. We shall note these, remembering that they were expressed right after Norwood and Verrall had presented their interpretation to the scholarly world.

Murray emphasizes one fact which it will be well for us to quote, namely, that "When a man is fairly confronted with death and is consciously doing his last work in the

38 Gilbert Murray, Euripides and his Age, London, Oxford University Press, 1st ed., 1913; 2nd ed., 1946. All references are to the 2nd ed.

39 Ibid., 1-2.

40 Ibid., 122.

world, the chances are that, if his brain is clear and unterrified, the deepest part of his nature will assert itself."⁴¹ Here we have a cogent argument against the rationalists. Euripides must have realized that the Bacchae was to be one of his last plays. Would he not have made sure that no one could mistake its meaning, that this last testament to the Athenians would be as free as possible of ambiguities? So we have all the more reason to believe that the meaning of the Bacchae is going to be something that most of us can grasp. This was no time for restraint or for double entendre. The poet had above all to be clear if he was to succeed in making his last message understood.

What then is clear to Murray about the Bacchae? He admits a certain confusion that hovers about the drama. Indeed, he could not well deny this. But since his purpose is not to expound the whole meaning of the Bacchae,⁴² he presents us with certain general conclusions which he believes to be true:

It is well to remember that, for all his lucidity of language, Euripides is not lucid about religion. His general spirit is clear: it is a spirit of liberation, of moral revolt, of much denial; but it also is a spirit of search and wonder and surmise. He was not in any sense a 'mere' rationalist.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 128.

⁴² Cf. ibid., 127-8, passim.

⁴³ Ibid., 123-4.

We appreciate most the last sentence of this quotation. Euripides' purpose was not entirely negative or destructive. There was more to it than that; indeed, we should say that if he were truly a poet and not a mere teacher, there would have to be. So, once again, we hear hints of a constructive purpose for the dramatist, and more and more we feel certain that the Bacchae must somehow, in spite of questions and doubts, receive a constructive interpretation.

With these remarks on Murray, our critical review as such must come to an end. We shall stop at 1913 since by this date all the main lines of interpretation have appeared. E. R. Dodds⁴⁴ and G. M. A. Grube⁴⁵ would naturally be treated here, too, were we not going to invoke their help so often in the positive matter to come. Of course, there are many other critics whose views might be set down. We have chosen only those who were the available representatives of the different schools, and whose comments and unanimities would serve to guide our own criticism. Others will be cited passim in the remainder of this thesis should their expression or elaboration of certain particulars prove useful to us.

The main lesson taught by the critics whom we have met

⁴⁴ Cf. Dodds, Euripides: Bacchae.

⁴⁵ G. M. A. Grube, The Drama of Euripides, London, Methuen, 1941.

in this second chapter, especially by determining what we mean by a constructive purpose for the poet and how such a purpose was in keeping with his personal genius and the spirit of his age.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The first two chapters have furnished us with the representative trends in Bacchae criticism. We have noted the points on which the various schools agree as well as the points on which they differ. The progress in this criticism and especially the welcome improvements that came with the turn of this century have been matter for favorable comment. Now, with this review as a background, we should be in a position to define more closely what problem the Bacchae presents to us.

This definition of the problem calls for nothing so much as a cautious clarity. If we are clumsy in this initial statement, we neither can hope to make our particular discussion of the Bacchae satisfactory, nor can we avoid covering ground already covered many times. The location, therefore, of the problem will require some few words of introduction.

First of all, at what sort of evaluation of the Bacchae does the present thesis aim? We must answer immediately that it will not be an evaluation of the play in its most

important respect, namely, as a tragic drama. The whole manner with which we have presented the critical review of opinion indicates that our main interest was to be in controverted issues, not in issues on which we meet with substantial agreement. The supreme value of the Bacchae as tragedy cannot well be disputed, or, even if it should be in some regards, such a dispute will not be our concern. This first qualification of ours is an explicit admission that we realize we are not treating the Bacchae's most important and significant aspect. A restriction of the subject has been necessary. We have chosen an aspect of lesser importance.

By such restriction in subject matter, we are also forced to admit that we are attempting something that is in a sense unnatural. We are not considering the Bacchae as that which it primarily was, tragedy; and this puts us at an immediate disadvantage. No particular aspect of a thing can be adequately understood apart from the reality in which it is embodied and from which it draws much of its significance. Therefore, if our concern is with Euripides' thought alone, we must not deceive ourselves into believing that we can totally prescind from the medium of that thought. But again, restriction of the subject is necessary and hence, along with restriction, some precision, however

undesirable.

Does such a limitation make our whole discussion useless? By no means. Our evaluation will be valid in so far as it goes, and we certainly hope it will be of some use to those who go on to consider the Bacchae in its larger aspects. Once we have admitted the difficulties under which we labor, as we have tried to do, there will be no danger of the reader's taking our conclusions for more than they are worth; nor will the reader be able to accuse us of self-deception or of over-emphasis.

The aspect of the Bacchae which we intend to evaluate will be an intellectual, not a dramatic or aesthetic aspect. It will deal with Euripides' thought, and with that aspect of his thought that is religious. And even more in particular, our interest will be in the sceptical and critical character of that thought and whether it insinuates itself into the Bacchae.

Since the word, evaluation, is being used in connection with the purpose of this thesis, it, too, will bear some explanation. In the title of the thesis, we have proposed to evaluate the Bacchae. But first we presented a history of Bacchae criticism. What will be the relation between the history and the so-called evaluation? The second will be

made against the background of the first. The evaluation will begin not a novo but from the points of agreement. Thus such a critical review becomes and will be used as an integral part of the thesis.

Now, when we say we shall start from points of agreement, no contradiction with a statement earlier in this chapter should be construed. Reference is made to the place where we say our interest will be rather in controverted issues than in issues on which there is substantial agreement. We adhere to this. When we say that our starting-point will be certain points of agreement, we signify points of agreement on the controverted issues themselves. Thus, for examples we could take the following. There is unanimous consent that the Bacchae is essentially a religious play. This general fact, then, will not need proof in the present treatment. There is also unanimity on the fact that Euripides maintained some kind of critical or sceptical attitude toward popular religion all his life. This again will not demand any proof. Admitted facts such as these will be the starting-point. The controversy arises in particular explanations and elaborations of these facts, and in the variety of opinions, for instance, on the extent and character of Euripides' orthodoxy, or on the extent of his scepticism.

Before beginning the evaluation, we shall take care to state the certain pertinent premises on which we have perceived almost universal consent on the part of the critics. This is the sense in which our evaluation will be said to begin from points of agreement. This should make more evident the importance of our critical review. It was not a mere presentation of opinions, but in presenting those opinions we characterized common trends and sifted the critics down as much as possible to their points of agreement. Such characterization and sifting served to set in relief not only the matters of agreement, but also the matters of disagreement. In these especially, we are very much interested, for it is in their regard that we hope to come, by the statement of the problem and by the evaluation that follows, to some satisfactory conclusions.

Of what nature will this evaluation itself be? It will be essentially the answer to certain questions. These questions will represent our formulation of the problem of the Bacchae. One question, which will be treated in the next chapter, will concern the whole life's work of Euripides, and this we shall refer to as the general problem of the Bacchae. Then there will be other particular problems that hinge on the solution we give to the first general problem. They will be treated in the chapter after the next.

In the case of the general problem to be solved, we shall rely much on authority and on the results of research done by others. In the case of the particular questions to be answered, more weight will be placed on internal evidence from the play itself. The reader might ask why a problem that does not especially involve the Bacchae has a place in this thesis. We can answer now that unless this general problem is solved, the other particular problems can themselves find no adequate solution. The next chapter is a necessary preparation for the particular questions we have to ask about the Bacchae. The answer we give to the first will largely determine our line of reasoning with regard to the second.

CHAPTER IV
THE GENERAL PROBLEM OF THE BACCHAE

The old assumption of the critics that the Bacchae marked a sort of repentance on the part of Euripides is the first problem we shall have to treat. Several examples of the different variations on this theme have been cited in the critical review. A modern writer has called such a theory almost "childish in its incompetence;"¹ yet along with this rather harsh judgment, he admits that there is some gleam of probability in the hypothesis. We shall attempt to state this first problem about the Bacchae in as precise a manner as possible.

One remark, though, should preface this statement. We do not intend to view this problem of whether or not the Bacchae was a reversal exactly as Euripidean critics are wont to view it. True, there will of necessity be a similarity between our statement of the problem and the traditional statement.² This thesis, however, means to go a bit more deeply into the palinode problem in that it hopes eventually

¹ Murray, 123.

² Cf. ibid; also, Grube, 398, for two varying views of the recantation theory. Sandys, as already referred to, is representative in his statement of it.

to assign a motive to the Bacchae. Our concern will not be primarily whether the Bacchae was as unorthodox as the works that preceded it. We can suppose such a discussion. Rather, we should like to add something to this. Just why was the poet orthodox or heterodox, as the case may be? And, more especially, why was this orthodoxy or heterodoxy always accompanied by criticism? The motive element, as it seems, is a consideration that has been rather generally slighted. The why of Euripides' critical attitude has had to yield place to multifarious discussions of the what of it.

Now, with this in mind, we shall begin the statement of the problem. Was the Bacchae a reversal on the part of the dramatist? We speak of a reversal or recantation. Of what might the Bacchae be such a recantation? It is possible that there is more than one respect in which this last play of Euripides marked a change in attitude, but once again this thesis must limit its subject. Therefore, we shall not ask whether the Bacchae was a reversal in dramatic technique, or whether it showed a new friendliness towards the mystical, or whether it reverses the poet's usual treatment of the gods who enter into his dramas. When the Bacchae is referred to as a reversal, it is usually with regard to the poet's attitude toward religion.

This is the traditional and most general understanding

of the palinode problem of the Bacchae. It is never a question, of course, of whether Euripides in this play passes from orthodoxy to heterodoxy, but vice versa. Some degree of dissension is always evident in the plays before the Bacchae. Jaeger says, "The relentless criticism to which his characters subject the gods accompanies all tragic action throughout his dramas..."³ Because of this scepticism, the critics, especially the earlier ones, jumped to conclusions and shouted cries of absolute heresy. The years, though, have somewhat softened this judgment and with them has arisen the thornier problem of just how sceptical was Euripides in his heart. This is to ask in other words just how orthodox was the poet. With regard to the Bacchae, then, does the dramatist abandon his usual program of scepticism and finally and unequivocally submit to established tradition, or is the Bacchae in the same spirit as the rest of his plays?

To answer this particular question, we must raise what we refer to in the title of this chapter as the general problem of the Bacchae. What end had Euripides in mind in his critical attitude toward the popular religion? What was the purpose of his scepticism in the plays that preceded

³ Werner Jaeger, Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture, (transl. by Gilbert Highet), New York, Oxford University Press, 1939, vol. I, 347.

the Bacchae? By determining this, we shall be in a position to compare the spirit of the Bacchae with the spirit of the former works. Let it be clear that we are not bent on determining one fixed attitude as characteristic of all the pre-Bacchae works of Euripides. In our statement of this attitude we hope to allow for its variation during a lifetime.⁴ Leeway must be left for the evolution and refinement of Euripides' critical purpose. Hence, its verification in the different plays may be quite dissimilar. Our definition of the attitude must not be so hidebound as to exclude these possible differences.

Therefore, since it is evident that we cannot pronounce on the general character of the Bacchae unless we decide on the general and characteristic purpose of all Euripides' criticism, we must examine his career in the hopes of detecting that purpose. Thus, we are taking as admitted the essential religious quality of the Bacchae. Were the Bacchae not essentially religious, our discussion would be of little import. We are taking for granted, too, that the poet's attitude toward religion was characterized by scepticism.

 4 This is a mistake, I believe, implicit in the neglect already mentioned of some of the earlier critics to consider the general character of Euripides' pre-Bacchae religious thought.

But we must add something with regard to this second admission. Are the critics unanimous in admitting that Euripides showed himself a sceptic in his plays? Yes. Are they unanimous in claiming that this scepticism was always only partial? Perhaps to the reader's surprise, we shall have to answer this second question also in the affirmative.

The exceptions that rise immediately to mind are Verrall and Norwood. Did not these and the whole school of rationalists claim that Euripides was a complete and thorough sceptic? This might be true, but Norwood, for instance, is willing to admit that in his plays Euripides betrayed in so many words only a part of this scepticism to the general public.⁵ The more intelligent and alert might have perceived the so-called devices by which the dramatist indicated that he meant to be regarded as a complete sceptic, but it remains that for the undiscerning multitude Euripides was only a partial sceptic. Ostensibly he picked the matter for his criticism and did not play his role of disbeliever promiscuously.

This admission on the part of the rationalists, that

⁵ "Euripides is a writer who produces his effects by indirect means, by the accumulation of innuendoes which force the reader to a conclusion not definitely formulated in words." Cf. Norwood, Riddle, 38; also, 130, ff.

the surface reading and interpretation of the plays reveals only a spirit of selective or partial criticism, is valuable. If those who oppose the theory of rationalism can show that "further indications" of complete disbelief such as the palace-miracle are not at all genuine, the ultimate conclusions of Norwood and Verrall will fall. We shall have successfully disproved the alleged network of double intention which alone, as they say, tells us of the true attitude of Euripides. With what then are we left? We are left with the prima facie remarks of doubt and scepticism that everyone acknowledges, but which are only part of Euripides' dramatics. Hence, we see we are justified in saying that even the rationalists admit that only a spirit of partial scepticism is immediately discernible in the works of the poet.

Since the scepticism is admittedly only partial, the obvious correlative is that these plays also give evidence of what is believed to be genuine piety and belief. Thus, as soon as we say partial scepticism characterized Euripides' work, we must also add that these same works are in some respects as far as religious spirit goes quite unassailable. Ordinarily this would be the place to determine, as far as might be possible, the extent of Euripides' scepticism and the corresponding extent of his belief. But the

territory involved in such discussions has been covered often before, and so we mean to suppose them in this thesis.⁶

Suffice it that we have pointed out that all the authorities agree that the plays of Euripides evince only partial scepticism. With regard to Norwood and Verrall, later on we shall attempt to show that their reasons for deducing an over-all disbelief from certain lines in the Bacchae are invalid.

Thus, during his whole life Euripides had criticised religion and the gods. So much so that, though they were contemporaries, he and Sophocles seem to be of different generations. Euripides was critic and sceptic, affected mightily by the sophistical spirit of the latter half of Athen's golden fifth century:

...the great difference between him [Euripides] and Sophocles is that he was deeply influenced by sophistic ideas. He has often been called 'the poet of the age of the enlightenment', and his extant tragedies (all written late in his career) are filled with the teachings and rhetorical devices of the sophists.⁷

6 E.g., the unpublished A.M. thesis of Rev. Vincent Horrigan, S.J., "A Re-examination of the Orthodoxy of Euripides," Chicago, Loyola University, 1943. Murray, 123, believes there can be no strict orthodoxy problem, since there was not "...any such thing as 'orthodoxy' to return to. For Greek religion had no creeds."

7 Jaeger, 329. Can the Alcestis (438), Medea (431) and Hippolytus (428), said to be written late in a career which extended from 455 to 406. It is not clear why Jaeger inserts this parenthesis.

As we have said, the fact of such criticism and such a spirit of doubt has been disputed by no one. We shall not cite the numerous examples of it here.⁸ Euripides, according to Jaeger, was merely claiming for himself the prerogative claimed by the other citizens of his day, "the same freedom of thought and speech in intellectual matters which was guaranteed to him in political life at the national assembly."⁹ Our question here should be: what prompted such pointed reservations as the line from the Helena to which we have already referred; or the chorus' startling parenthesis in the Electra, λέγεται, τὰν δὲ πίστιν σμικρὰν παρ' ἔμοι γ' ἔχει, Euripides' conclusion to a bit of myth.¹⁰ Why does he not scruple to burst the bubble of such a tradition as that of Diké and her judgment of men's sins from the tribunal of Olympus?¹¹ And so on through innumerable examples of censure and doubt.

Three possibilities suggest themselves as ultimate explanations of this scepticism. By discussing all three of them, by giving reasons for and against each, we shall hope to decide which of them, according to authority and in view of the evidence, is the most plausible.

8 For a detailed treatment, cf. Decharme, 59-132, and Grube, 41-62.

9 Jaeger, 336.

10 Electra, vv. 737-8; cf. also, supra., p. 32, n. 8.

11 Nauck, Melanippe Bound, fragm. 506.

These three solutions are as follows. Was it for the sake of personal self-gratification, in spontaneous indulgence of his own cynical and pessimistic bent of character, that Euripides kept prodding the mythological and religious conscience of the Athenians? Or was he launching a concentrated and planned attack on myth with a positive hope of eventually rationalizing away traditional religion? This explanation will be referred to as a destructive purpose. Or, finally, did he aim to purify the people's religion by stimulating them to question its unworthy elements? Let us consider each of these possibilities.

"Un des caractères essentiels de la morale d'Euripide est le pessimisme."¹² πικρὸς, δύσους, αὐστηρὸς, are adjectives applied to him in his anonymous life.¹³ Suidas tells us that he studiously avoided public gatherings,¹⁴ and from what we have heard of his cave-retreat on the island of Salamis, we can guess that a multitude of private connections was not to his liking.¹⁵ In fact, everything

12 Decharme, 105. The author is, however, criticised for undue emphasis on Euripides' pessimism in a review of this work by Grace H. Macurdy in the Classical Weekly, I (1907), 5-6.

13 Quoted by Nauck, Euripidis Tragoediae, Leipzig, Teubner, 1895, xxiv, n. 36, from the anonymous Vita Euripidis, v. 64. Cf. William N. Bates, Euripides, Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia Press, 1930, 16-7, where the extant portraits of Euripides are considered in the light of these epithets.

14 Suidas, Vita Euripidis.

15 Ibid.

points to an extremely melancholic personality, one that we can well imagine would delight in scandalizing the little ones with his doubts and his criticisms. His contemporaries and the Attic comedians all described him as a lonely man.¹⁶ Was it, then, personal indulgence that motivated Euripides' attitude toward religion? Was it out of sheer contempt for the vulgar opinion of the times that this enlightened one took it upon his dramatic self to undermine belief?

Two reasons in particular move us to answer in the negative. The first is our acquaintance with the poet, Euripides, in the nineteen of his extant dramas. In them he shows himself capable of high lyric exultation, or altruism of a rare sort, of an insight into the human heart that earns him the title, "erste Psychologe."¹⁷ In the face of such sublime poetic genius, we rightly shrink from attributing to him motives so purely personal in his dramatic treatment of myth. As a poet he had to rise out of a merely self-regarding attitude, if he were to conceive a universal mission.

Secondly, we can be sure that the Athenian people, of

¹⁶ Jaeger, 353.

¹⁷ Jaeger in vol. I of the German edition of his work, Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin, 419.

whom Pericles had said that they sought to banish melancholy with their annual relaxations and games and sacrifices, would have ostracized such a patent egoist from the stage, had they perceived him as such.¹⁸ Furthermore, tradition tells us the Euripides, when censured by the people or the state for overboldness in expressing his opinions made haste to apologize and to reinstate himself as an acceptable playwright.¹⁹ Were he the cynical iconoclast, the notice afforded by public rebuff certainly would not have prompted him to do this. We can admit that at times he seems to delight in his own cynicism, but "it can hardly be contended that the general tone of the plays is cynical and offensive."²⁰

The first possible explanation of Euripides' critical attitude is not at all plausible. We must look further for a more solid and probable motive for his criticism. However, the elements of which this theory is composed are in themselves true, and serve, therefore, to throw some light on Euripides' character. It may, indeed, be that at times he was merely venting personal ire and annoyance, but, again, it cannot be said to characterize the body of his work.

 18 Thucydides, II, 38.

19 E.g., on the occasion of some verses from the Danaé (Nauck, Trag. Graec. Frag., fragm. 324); also, the first verse of the Melanippe Bound. Cf. Decharme, 26-7.

20 Haigh, 229.

The theory has not been seriously proposed by anyone of Euripides' critics; yet, while they would reject it as just formulated, now and then they seem to accept some of its implications when they are forced to give a final explanation of the problem.

The second explanation of Euripides' critical attitude which we shall examine is connected with the rationalist school, with Verrall and Norwood in particular. We have already had occasion to cite their principal tenets, but we shall find some excuse for restating them in their importance to the subject of this chapter.

First of all, we owe much to this school. They were the first who, ex professo, tried to probe the motive problem in Euripides and to see just what he was about. Of course, they admitted what all before them had admitted about the critical tone of most of the dramas. But Verrall wanted to go much further than this. He tried to find a common design amid Euripidean diversity. He wanted to clear the poet of the charge that he was a "botcher" and one who, full of purple patches, evidenced no universal consistency or mastery in his work.²¹ Such an aim was a noble one and worthy of the skill Verrall brought to its accomplish-

²¹ Cf. Verrall, Euripides the Rationalist, 2, ff.

ment. He had picked out one of the essential, but as yet unanswered, problems of Euripidean criticism.

But it was unfortunate that Verrall's zeal to answer this problem was to carry him so far. We have already quoted the opinion of one scholar who reviewed his first work on the subject. That reviewer said that Verrall carries plausible premises too far, that he rides them to death. This has since the beginning of the century been the almost unanimous verdict on his work, if that work be considered as a whole. Grube and Dodds each use the same word, fantastic, to characterize some of his conclusions.²² But neither of them, on the other hand, is reluctant in admitting how much he owes to Verrall's genius and pioneer spirit.

How is the rationalist explanation of Euripides' criticism pertinent to the present chapter? Rationalist theories have a place in this chapter since they are theories designed to explain Euripides' intention in departing from orthodoxy in favor of criticism of the gods and of mythology. Their starting-point is the reservation that on the face of it, Euripides was only a partial sceptic. But in the plots of his plays²³ they pretend to find difficulties that point to a complete scepticism on the poet's part.

 22 Cf. Grube, 398; Dodds, xxxviii.

23 In Euripides the Rationalist, Verrall examines the plots of the Alcestis, Ion, and Iphigenia in Taurica. On p. 176

These insinuations, they say, were not meant to be understood by the general public, but would serve their purpose if discerned by the intelligentsia. And these certain indications were the justification of their over-all conclusion that Euripides was a total and a mere rationalist, that he had no real religion at all unless it was the religion of the extreme sophists.

This last statement with regard to the sophists is not one made by the rationalists themselves. It is merely a conclusion we very readily draw from their description of Euripides' spirit. According to them, he is an iconoclast at heart. Is this not true, too, of the extreme sophists of his day? And by these, we mean men like Thrasy machus and Antiphon whose profession or religion, as we might say, was a code of "cynical disbelief" and whose only positive object in life was to make their way in the world regardless of

 he summarizes Euripides' method as evidenced in those plays: "In each case the body of the work, the story acted by the real dramatis personae, is strictly realistic in tone and fact, and in purport contradictory to 'religion' (that is to say, to certain decadent superstitions); while the prologue and epilogue, in sharp opposition to the drama proper and therefore with manifest irony, assert pro forma the miraculous explanation which the facts tend visibly to invalidate and deny." Elsewhere, he praises the Herakles of Wilamowitz-Moellendorff because the author "...has sat down to expound a religious play by Euripides upon the principal, firmly grasped and plainly stated, that the main purpose of the dramatist was to present a criticism of religion." Cf. "Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's Heracles of Euripides," The Classical Review, X (1896), 42-6.

morals or religion.²⁴ Of course, there were other sophists like Anaxagoras, for instance, who seemed to be sincere in their search for truth and whose aim was genuinely constructive.

Once again we must distinguish and the distinction is none too easily made. Eventually, we ourselves, with Jaeger, will say that Euripides was full of the sophistical spirit of his age, but this is not to describe him in the terms of the rationalists who make his purpose purely negative and destructive. Jaeger himself is careful lest his words be confused to indicate that Euripides' sophistical spirit was mean or pragmatic.²⁵ This subject will come up for explanation in the next section of this chapter.

What kept Euripides, according to the rationalists' theory, from exposing fully the skeleton of his disbelief to the multitude? Why was he at all guarded in his criticism, and why did he feign partial orthodoxy? Because his audience in general was not ready for anything else. They were attached to the old form, at least, of the drama in which piety and belief were the traditional structure around which the plot was built. We can ask, then, whether

²⁴ Cf. "Sophists," Oxford Classical Dictionary, Clarendon Press, 1949.

²⁵ Jaeger, 329 ff.

the poet did not have good reason to fear that the fate that had overtaken Anaxagoras, and which was soon to overtake Socrates, be meted out to him. Thus, for various reasons, he had to restrain himself and to couch his atheism in the phrase of tradition.²⁶

Such an explanation of Euripides' criticism has met with the satisfaction of no one but the rationalists themselves. And even Norwood in his Greek Tragedy, which was published twenty years after the Riddle, tones down his theory considerably²⁷ and makes sure to offer a plausible explanation of the Bacchae which is not necessarily based on it. We shall rely, therefore, on the consensus of the critics as our basis for rejecting the rationalists' interpretation of Euripides' motive in the plays before the Bacchae.²⁸ As for the Bacchae itself, we shall attempt to show from the play that this second theory cannot be applied to it.

Both of the views already advanced are extreme. The first would have forced us to believe that Euripides did not care a whit about the opinion of his audience, that he was a thorough egoist. The second would have him, contrary to to the prima facie evidence, a complete atheist bent on

26 Cf. Norwood, Riddle, 8-17.

27 Norwood, Greek Tragedy, 281, ff. This involves no actual retraction, but merely diminished emphasis.

28 Cf. Dodd's arguments, xlv-xlvii, for a neat disposal of the rationalists' theories.

nothing less than atheism for his audience, too. But the third view is not extreme. It steers the well-known via media and thus recommends itself from the beginning.

We should like to find the most natural explanation possible for Euripides' career of criticism. It should be an explanation that is in keeping with the facts, that is in keeping with Euripides' genius as a dramatist; and its plausibility will be increased if it be also in keeping with the spirit of Euripides' age. This last quality is not necessary, but it certainly is desirable.

What have the facts told us? The facts tell us that his scepticism was only partial, for they point not only to scepticism, but also to belief. This is a matter on which there is universal agreement. In every treatment of Euripides' heterodoxy, there is room for a list of his expressions of piety as well as for his expressions of doubt.²⁹ Unless, then, some further fact forces us to discount such an immediate impression, we shall be obliged to accept his scepticism not as complete, but as only partial.³⁰

 29 E.g., Grube, 41-62, his chapter on the gods.

30 James Adam in the book, The Religious Teachers of Greece, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1908, 296, says: "At the outset...we observe that Euripides' indictment of the Gods of Greece itself proceeds on certain assumptions as to the true nature of the Godhead." The pages that follow detail the poet's positive theology as exemplified in some of the plays.

The only school that has advanced a reason for such rejection of the immediate evidence are the rationalists. But other critics are one in rejecting the rationalist theories.

What, then, are we prompted to conclude? The most logical explanation of such a partial scepticism is that the poet himself was not an out-and-out atheist. What reason did he have for being so consistently critical? Various reasons have been proposed. One is that he wanted to give the people's theological conscience a jolt, and spur them to some few questions about the worthiness of the gods as they were wont to conceive them. Others say that, for his own satisfaction at least, he wanted to build up a rational Greek religion, not be destroying the traditions of the old, but by purging them of all their indecorous elements. Whichever of these two variations we accept, we must agree that Euripides' purpose was constructive.³¹

The The picture presented by this third explanation is a logical and natural one. It shows us a very popular dramatist, one of the greatest artists of Athen's golden age. He is a playwright who is given to criticism in his plays, and this criticism draws our attention as it drew the attention of his -----

31 Decharme, Haigh, Jaeger, Grube, support this explicit conclusion by their discussions, many of which have already been referred to.

contemporaries.³² Is he sincere in this criticism? Most certainly. Where he has a doubt, he is not afraid to express it. Where he believes, he is likewise forceful, and no less edifying, in recording his belief. He is a dramatist that is honest with his audience, and who seems to wish that they begin to doubt certain things along with him. He is a dramatist who does not fill his plays with insincere protestations of orthodoxy, but who is forthright in advocating a new rationality in religion. He does so not because he thinks little of religion, but because he thinks much of it. Euripides is a zealous sacristan in the sanctuary of his gods intent on driving from it either men or ideas that cheapen the sanctity of the cult.

Such a picture of Euripides is a pleasant one to contemplate; but once again we must serve warning that in discussing the motive problem we do not pretend to be treating the most important aspect of Euripides' work. This problem of the motive will be subordinate to other considerations and will receive its proper light and shadow only when seen in its actual setting. This setting, as Dodds

 32 "That the conservative section of the Athenians looked upon Euripides as a disbeliever, does not admit of doubt." Adam, 294. This emphasizes his reputation as a critic, but by no means denies the core of belief which was also present.

constantly reminds us,³³ is the drama of Euripides. Yet again, we are right in trying to come to some satisfactory, even though proximate conclusions on a subject that disturbs our understanding of the poet.

The picture, I say, is a pleasant one to contemplate, and we need not be afraid that our pleasure is without justification. This third hypothesis is entirely in keeping with the non-sceptical elements of Euripides' work. Surely, we must find an explanation for these sections as well as for those that seem heterodox. In attributing this constructive purpose to the poet, we are not forced to explain away his piety on the grounds of expediency or ineptitude. It fits the prima facie facts as everyone agrees they are to be found. Furthermore, the genius of Euripides as a dramatist inclines us to ascribe a noble purpose to his criticism, one that is consonant with his high calling and the noble manner in which he lived up to it. Otherwise, we should have to say, perhaps, that he was making his tragedy a vehicle for his personal heresy, twisting it to extremist doctrines as much as he dared. We are rightly unwilling to picture the dramatist in this role.

 33 E.g., Dodds, xlii. Murray admitted that his greatest difficulty in writing about Euripides was to treat his different aspects without loss of perspective or proportion.

Finally, this theory of a constructive purpose is entirely in keeping with Euripides' part as poet of the age of enlightenment.³⁴ This task of constructive enlightenment is characteristically the mission of the sophists, and here we do not mean the extremists who brought such disrepute on the name. Where these lacked a sound moral foundation for their educational theory,³⁵ Euripides' mission of enlightenment did not. He, too, was given to the rationalistic method of questioning the improbable and arguing away the improper, but his method was not for its own sake. The same is true of the other genuine artists of his day who strove to rejuvenate Athens along the new educational lines:

Nothing is so characteristic of the naturalistic trend of that age as the effort made by its artists to keep mythology from becoming empty and remote, by revising its standards to suit the facts of real life viewed without illusion. Euripides attacked this strange new task, not in cold blood, but with the passionate energy of a strong artistic personality, and with unshaken perseverance in the face of many years of defeat and discouragement.³⁶

And this is why "we must read Euripides' tragedies entirely as expressions of the troubles and problems of the late

34 This epithet is the title of a German work on the poet by Wilhelm Nestlé, Euripides der Dichter der Griechischen Aufklärung, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1901.

35 Jaeger, 329.

36 Ibid., 340.

fifth century."³⁷

Now that we have concluded that Euripides' purpose in his religious criticism was constructive, where do we find ourselves with regard to the Bacchae? We are ready now to answer the question: was the Bacchae a reversal of the life attitude of Euripides? Just as this chapter provided the remote background for answering this question, the next will furnish us with more immediate apparatus in order to judge finally whether such an hypothesis fits the Bacchae or not. This will take us into the play itself and into a consideration of its theme and characters. With such material at hand, then, we can adjudge the general character of the Bacchae, whether constructive in its purpose or not, and see what were its peculiar contributions one way or the other. This will constitute the final phase of our evaluation of the play.

37 Ibid., 329.

CHAPTER V
THE MEANING OF THE BACCHAE

The principal general problem of the Bacchae has been said to be whether it is a palinode or not. To answer this question, we have found it necessary to decide what was the religious tone of the pre-Bacchae works of Euripides. This was determined in the last chapter. Now, we must pass to the play itself, and examine its theme and two principal characters, Dionysus and Pentheus. Once we have by this means given the play a definite interpretation, we shall be qualified to pronounce on its relation with the rest of the poet's work.

The story which the Bacchae tells was well known to the Athenian audience.¹ It represented the coming of Dionysus to Thebes. With his Asiatic followers, the god means to establish his cult in Thebes against the opposition of the Theban king, Pentheus. Thebes, we will recall, was the home and final burial place of Dionysus' mother, Semele, who after union with Zeus gave birth to the god. All this we learn from the prologue² where Dionysus presents

1 Cf. Patin, 233, ff.

2 Vv. 1-63.

himself and tells of his mission. Disguised as a priest of his own cult, he will approach Pentheus to persuade him to join the bacchant s on nearby Cithaeron where they are holding their revels.

But Pentheus, as it turns out, is vehement in his condemnation of the new cult and exceeding wroth against the mysterious stranger. He orders him to be apprehended and, after hearing his story, how the women of Thebes have succumbed to the god's influence, he has Dionysus bound by his servants and taken away to the stables of the palace. He accompanies this incarceration with indignation and insults.

The disguised god, however, will not be thus abused. By invoking his patron, Dionysus, he escapes from his bonds and calls down ruin on the palace. Then he meets Pentheus again. The king, disregarding the manifestations of divine power, has been aroused by reports of the miracles on Cithaeron and his curiosity, almost lustful, about the revels, is quite evident. The stranger suggests to him that he can view the rites safely if he goes disguised as a woman. But the unhappy Pentheus is no longer himself, and by the end of this scene it is clear that Dionysus has him completely under his influence.

The pair make their way to Cithaeron where they spy on the revelers. Of a sudden, the frenzied women catch sight of the wretched Pentheus and in a moment have invaded his hiding place and torn him to pieces with their bare hands. Agave, Pentheus' mother, is the leader of this gruesome assault, and it is she who bears in triumph the head of her dead son back to the city. To Cadmus and the others, she is, indeed, a pitiful sight. Finally, they bring her back to her senses, the god makes his appearance and explains that it is by the will of Zeus that such misfortune has come about. And Agave, bitter and crushed in her sorrow, renounces the new religion.

This is the story of the Bacchae, the tale of the opposition of Pentheus to the new religion and the dire consequences that followed for him. The tale is easily told, and there can be no doubt about the unity of the impression it must have produced on the Athenian audience who first saw it. They would have no time for the minute philosophical speculations that occupy us so many centuries after the play's production. Nor would they have pause to compare the characters in detail, to dissect the lines put into the mouths of each one, and to pronounce on the chance insinuations which any honest critic of Euripides must concede are present. Rather, their one reaction would be horror at

the tremendous folly of the king, Pentheus, in resisting the deity, and the terrible fate meted out to him in reprisal. One reading the play for the first time catches one's breath at the sight of this. But then, when we sit back and allow ourselves to ponder the play, we ask how just was this punishment. We ask whether we should reprimand the brashness and insolence of Pentheus rather than the cruelty of the invading god.

But before we do attempt to investigate the Bacchae more closely, let us set a few limits to our interest. Surely, there are already a sufficient number of companion commentaries for the play, and one more along the conventional lines would be out of place here.³ Hence, we do not intend to take the play scene for scene in order to contrast the different moods or to trace the development of the opposition between Dionysus and the king. Our treatment in the present case will keep to much simpler lines. There is neither time nor demand for more than this. We shall try to grasp the meaning of the Bacchae as it must have been grasped by the audience who saw it enacted. We think this of value because wuch a reaction surely what the poet himself had in mind when he injected into this stirring drama a certain

 3 The most recent of these is R. P. Winnington-Ingram's Euripides and Dionysus, Cambridge University Press, 1948.

import and signification. We shall not attempt technicalities, therefore, but make sure that we realize the theme of the Bacchae and the place in this theme of the two main characters, the god and the king. What did their opposition mean to the poet? And what did he want it to mean to the audience?

As far as we can tell, very few have given prolonged consideration to the general impression produced by the Bacchae. Surely, they would agree in their common impression, but unfortunately, they are not guided by this impression in assigning a meaning to the play as a whole. Since the Bacchae does present some knotty problems once its intellectual and dramatic elements have been dissected, the critics are prone to lose sight of the general considerations and emphasize their more technical and specialized findings. This thesis hopes to make a step in the right direction in remedying this defect, if, indeed, it really exists. The open spirit of Murray in his criticism of Euripides has served as a model, in method at least, for the present investigation.

However, there is one promise that must be kept before we proceed further. We must deal with the problem of the palace-miracle and see how justified the rationalists are in taking it as the main clue that Euripides did not mean the Dionysus of the play to be taken as a god at all. The

reader will recall the argument. No one but the god and the chorus make mention of the miracle that is supposed to have wrecked by fire and earthquake the whole of Pentheus' palace when the imprisoned stranger called on the aid of his patron, Dionysus. Yet, the rationalists contend, if the palace had really been destroyed, Pentheus would surely have adverted to it, especially since he was supposed to be in the palace at the time. So, they conclude that when the chorus speaks of the palace-miracle, they are in a trance induced by the visiting stranger who is merely an Asiatic charlatan skilled in such matters. The chorus, as his partisans, are the natural subject of this hypnotism, and, as it turns out, they are the only ones to believe a miracle has taken place at all. Elsewhere, we have put down the further conclusions drawn from the hypothesis of the palace-miracle.⁴ Do we have to believe that the palace-miracle takes place or not? That is our problem.

Our answer must be that the palace-miracle does take place and that part of Pentheus' dwelling is destroyed.⁵ The words of the chorus that are supposed to indicate the ruin done to the palace are these:

⁴ Cf. *supra*, p. 33, ff.

⁵ Grube, 398, n. 1.

πρὸς δὲ τοῖς αὐτῷ τὰς ἄλλας Βακχίους λυμνίεται·
δῶματα ἔρρηξεν χαλάρει· συντεθράνεται δ' ἄπαν ⁶

Grube notes here that ἄπαν as used in this text is vague and certainly does not go with δῶματα. Hence, there is no conclusive reason for saying that the whole palace was said to be torn down. Further, "The word συντεθράνεται is only found here, and its meaning is uncertain."⁷ All that we need believe were affected by the earthquake and the fire are the stables, ἵππικὰ φάτνα, where Pentheus had directed that the stranger be imprisoned.⁸ These, doubtless, were not represented on the stage, so off-stage noises and crashes would effectually dramatize this instance of the god's power. The fact that Pentheus does not mention these happenings is quite consonant with his attitude towards the god as evidenced in the first part of the drama: "Clearly he does not connect it with his prisoner's exit, and has not learned his lesson."⁹

Nothing would have been easier than to have Pentheus blow the gaff on the miracles—denying the reality of the earthquake, impugning the good sense or the good faith of the Herdsman—had the poet so chosen. But the King, so quick to scent license and venality, is allowed on these points no single word of doubt. Again, the prologue, whose speaker is at pains to make it clear to the meanest intelligence that he is a god preparing to masquerade as a man, becomes either on Norwood's or on

6 Vv. 632-3.

7 Grube, 411, n.1; 408-11, passim.

8 Vv. 510-11.

9 Grube, 411.

Verrall's view a gratuitous mystification.¹⁰

This is the last space we shall give to the rationalists. The palace-miracle is no good reason for believing that Dionysus was not a god, and so their whole hypothesis on the Bacchae's meaning falls. As Grube says, and it well sums up the fundamental error of this school: "...they put the poet himself in front of the play instead of behind it; they see the drama only through the haze of their preconceived ideas..."¹¹

The principal impact of the Bacchae, as we have noted, must have been due to the horror and pity which the audience felt at the fate of Pentheus. Certainly, these would be the predominating emotions of anyone who witnessed the play's performance. The reaction of the audience would be quite akin to the desolate sorrow that weighs on the unfortunate Cadmus and Agave in the last scene.¹² Small consolation does the appearance of Dionysus bring at a moment like this, and small wonder that Agave ends by repudiating a god so cruel as he.¹³

10 Dodds, xlv. Cf. also p. 141 for the supposed findings in the earthquake scene.

11 Grube, 399. We have followed Grube substantially in refuting the palace-miracle. However, if we remember that the Dionysiac ἐνθουσιασμός was essentially one of delusion, it is not so unfeasible that there be some hypnotism in the play. Thus, the rationalist theory is not quite so ridiculous as some would have it.

12 Vv. 1280, ff.

13 Vv. 1381, ff.

But we cannot permit ourselves to acquiesce in these emotions of horror and pity without asking the reasons for them. The poet certainly did not mean to work so deeply an emotional an effect on his audience for no reason at all. We have just witnessed the conflict between two personalities, one divine and one human, and it was this conflict that was the burden of the drama. Let us examine briefly, then, the character of these two opponents as Euripides drew it in the lines of the Bacchae. Does he wish us to sympathize wholly with one of them, or is there a conflict, too, in our sympathies? Having touched on these matters, we can decide on the meaning to be given to the whole spectacle.

To ask whether Euripides is for or against Dionysus is a flat-footed question, says Dodds.¹⁴ But whether or not the question itself is answerable, it can be used as a convenient starting-point. The information to which it leads may eventually be of greater moment than the question itself. Indeed, we can say now that it does not admit of a satisfactory solution; yet this very fact tells us something about the play. Neither Dionysus nor Pentheus was wholly good, and the attempt to whitewash either one of them is bound to involve some twisting of the facts. At first glance, Pentheus might be taken to be the martyr of the play, and as some would have

14 Dodds, xlii.

it, the martyr of the enlightenment.¹⁵ A judgment that makes Pentheus wholly innocent cannot be passed except by ignoring the facts:

Pentheus, though his case against the new worship is so good, and he might so easily have been made into a fine martyr, like Hippolytus, is left harsh and unpleasant, and very close to the ordinary "tyrant" of Greek tragedy.¹⁶

We could hope for more success in trying to show the evil of Dionysus than the virtue of Pentheus. Neither of them is totally bad. Each has his good points, and this is what makes the problem of deciding where Euripides' sympathy lay so difficult. But, as we have hinted, the very existence of such a difficulty will aid us in determining the meaning of the play.

First of all, let us take the god, and see what kind of person the poet makes him out to be. What stands out in the prologue is the manifest divinity of Dionysus, and the adamant firmness of his intent to evangelize Thebes, by force if necessary. We immediately have the picture of determination, and only this, but we are convinced that this god has the power to carry out his resolve against any opposition. Such an impression disposes us to sympathize with anyone who might dare to prevent the god from fulfilling

15 Cf. Paul Masqueray, *Euripide et ses Idées*, Paris, 1908, 147.

16 Gilbert Murray, *Euripides: Bacchae*, (transl. into English rhyming verse), New York, Longmans, 88.

his mission, and thus we are prepared to fear and tremble for the eventual insolence of the king, Pentheus. Even in the prologue, we hear of Pentheus, of whom the god himself says:

ὅς θεομαχεῖ τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ καὶ πτόνδων ἄπο
ὡθεῖ μ' ἐν εὐχαίς τ' οὐδ' αὖ μοδὸν μέλαινα ἔχει
ὅν οὐδ' ἐκ' αὐτῷ θεὸς γέγωνας ἐνδείξομαι
πάντ' ἢ τὴν θηβόλοισιν. .17

And the whole object of Dionysus' coming is ὅν' εἴην ἐμπαύρης
δαίμων βροτοῖς .18

These two characteristics of resolution and power stay with Dionysus throughout the play, even while he is not manifestly the god, but merely in disguise. Such is the calm and absolute control that the stranger shows on every occasion, even when the insolence of Pentheus is at its height, that we are forced to recall that his person is divine and that he has good reason for feeling so safe and so sure of getting his way.

Dodds, too, notes the unruffled, smiling sang froid with which Dionysus meets every situation in the play, and how this calm contrasts with the flurried excitement and animosity of the human Pentheus. Of this calm, the god himself is evidently aware, as when he tells the chorus with

17 Vv. 45-8.

18 V. 22.

some pride the vivid story of the efforts of his captors at imprisoning him in the after-part of the palace, while all the time he was most at his ease:

πρὸς φάτνας δὲ ταῦτον εὐρών, οὐ καθεῖρε' ἡμᾶς ἄγων,
εἶδε περὶ βρόχους ἐβάλλε· γόνασι καὶ χηλαῖς ποδῶν,
θυμὸν ἐκπνέων, ἰδρῶτα σώματος στάγῳν αὐτοῦ,
χέλεσσιν διδοὺς ὀδόντας· πλησίον δ' ἐγὼ παρῶν 19
ἡσυχῶς θάσσων ἔλευσσον.

The furious efforts of the poor human jailor are invain. The contrast with the self-assurance of the god is almost comic. Dionysus says simply:

αὐτὸς ἐφέως' ἐμαυτὸν ῥαδίως ἄνευ πόνου 20

If ἡσυχία is one of the qualities characteristic of a god, Dionysus certainly must pass as such.

So, as the play proceeds, we begin to wonder just what revenge this god will take on the one who opposes him. This is another reason for our suspense. We know of the god's power. He has shown it in the palace-miracle. But now, will he use it in a similar manner to punish Pentheus? This we do not yet know. It certainly is not going to be by a forthright manifestation of his divinity. Rather, he will employ means that are more devious than this. He will have Pentheus trap himself. The divine revenge will be the more terrible for the fact that the king walks into it of his volition. Through the very failings of the human

19 Vv. 618-22.

20 V. 614.

being of whom he intends to exact retribution, does Dionysus actually work this reprisal. Thus, the calm of the god assumes a mysterious, sinister character as the play goes on. He is playing with Pentheus as it is his divine prerogative to do. The chorus gives expression to this feeling of the audience when they cry out to Bacchus to doom the insolent king:

ὦ Βάκχε θηράρευτᾶ βακχῶν
γελῶντι προῶτῳ περίβαλε βρόχον
βαλάντιον ὑπὲρ γέλαυ πέτον-
τι τῶν κύνων. 21

If the god is the mighty irresistible force, in what light must we view Pentheus? He is the frail human being who puts up a show of opposition to this force, and who for his insolence is foredoomed to defeat. As Murray said, he has the qualities of the typical tyrant. Dodds lists some of these qualities for us, adding others peculiar to Pentheus himself:

...absence of self-control (214, 343ff., 620 f., 670 f.); willingness to believe the worst on hearsay evidence (221 ff.), or on none (225 ff.); brutality towards the helpless (231, 241, 511 ff., 796 f.) and a stupid reliance on physical force as a means of settling spiritual problems (781-6 n.). In addition he [Euripides] has given him the foolish racial pride of a Hermione (483-4 n.), and the sexual curiosity of a Peeping Tom (222-3n., 957-60 n.).²²

21 Vv. 1020-3.

22 Dodds, xl.

Does it not seem that Euripides wished our sympathy to be wholly against a person of this kind? What other reaction can we have in the face of such a character than to be repelled.

The character of Pentheus is not so simply drawn as the quotation shown above from Dodds might lead us to believe. True, he might have all these failings, but in none of them is he extraordinarily abnormal. The character of Pentheus could not have been a grotesque thing to the Athenians. They could perceive many traits in it that were common to themselves. Especially can this be said of the Athenians of Euripides' day. The spirit of the age was in many ways a vulgar spirit. Gone was the idealism of the former days. There was a tendency now to pettiness and to an earthy realism:

The age of Euripides was characterized by a calculating, business-like, profit-and loss way of looking at everything, from the smallest detail of private life to the greatest political problem.²³

Even if the Athenians did see Pentheus as he is depicted above, and this is not at all certain, such a person could not be repugnant to them. He was too much a reflection of themselves for that.

Besides, Pentheus does have his recommendations. He

23 Jaeger, 331.

is acting in good faith in his initial opposition to the god. Here was a mystic stranger whose spell had captured the women of Thebes, among them Pentheus' own mother and her sisters. What king would not be disturbed at such an invader and hostile to him? As the head of the city, he was responsible for public order. Norwood has no little truth on his side when he says of Pentheus:

He is not without faults, but they are
the weaknesses of immature greatness,
not the vices of hardened godlessness;
his character is not lacking in courage,
sympathy, or common-sense, but uncertain
in the application of these qualities.
Time would have mellowed him into a
second Theseus, but alas! in this case
the mills of the gods do not grind slowly,
and the injured deity is less patient than his vot-
ary Cadmus.²⁴

Our sympathies are on the side of this Pentheus precisely because he is human like us. We would expect more tolerance from a god. "To err is human; to forgive, divine." The very ruthlessness and intransigence of Dionysus turn us against him, and incline us to grieve for the king, and to say that his punishment was neither just nor becoming.

Euripides intended this conflict that we experience in trying to decide with whom we shall finally place our sympathy. If the play had been settled in the last scene with complete and obvious justice, the people would have

24 Norwood, Riddle, 65-6.

returned home with their minds closed on the subject. But the conflict of good and evil qualities in both the characters of the god and of the king leaves a question in our minds. The problem is by no means settled with the final words of the chorus. And this is our first clue to the meaning of the play, the fact that it leaves us wondering whether Pentheus deserved his horrible fate.

This question that the Bacchae leaves inevitably in our minds does not center really about the problem of the justice of the punishment. This is a question that probably will never be answered adequately. Rather, we are left wondering whether there was anything Pentheus should have done, anything he could have done, to avoid his horrible end. Is the poet making an example of the king in order to warn his audience against their incurring the same fate?

Four verses in the play which all agree are Euripides' were spoken by Teiresias near the beginning of the drama. We have quoted them already, but they are important enough to be put down a second time:

οὐδὲν τοφιδόμεθα τοῖσι δαίμοσιν.
 πατρίους παρὰ δοχάς, ὡς θ' ἀμύλητος χρόνῳ
 κερτήμεθ', οὐδεὶς αὐτὰ καταβαλεῖ λόγος.
 οὐδ' εἰ δὲ ἄκρων τὸ τοφὸν ἡύρηται φρενῶν.

25

In these lines Teiresias tells Cadmus, who has just protested that he does not condemn the gods, that it is not their part to rationalize or to argue about, σοφιστεῖν, the traditions handed down by their ancestors. This rationalization is something that Pentheus himself would attempt in his opposition to the god. But, as the seer later tries to warn him, there is no room for such rationalization in religion. Because he persists in his course, Pentheus comes almost necessarily to his doom. The old men saved themselves by unreasoning submission. Pentheus sealed his fate by not following their example. What should he have done that he did not do? Submit unequivocally to the god and to his religion.

Now we are getting to the heart of the matter. The plot of the Bacchae, and its characters, begin to assume some wider meaning than that of the literal tradition. Dionysus begins to appear to us, not as the head of a particular cult, but as the representative of all Greek religions. The doom he metes out to opposition is somehow typical of the fate to be expected by all who approach religion with the mind of Pentheus, with the purpose to σοφιστεῖν. The conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus takes on the aspect of an analogue of modern religion and him who was confronted with it.

If the god is the type of religion, of what class is Pentheus the type? We have already mentioned his main characteristic, the desire to rationalize. Thus he is identified with a σοφία all his own, which we are justified in saying was much similar to the wisdom of the sophists. The σοφία theme is carried on throughout the Bacchae, and always along the lines of the central opposition between the god and the man.²⁶ The wisdom of Dionysus is opposed to the wisdom of Pentheus: Dionysus who demands complete, unreasoning submission; Pentheus who would hold off. Which of these two is the wisdom we should expect Euripides to recommend for the imitation of his audience?

Pentheus, as we have said, could have been expected to remind the Athenians of themselves. His qualities were average, his inclination "to measure everything by the vulgar yardstick of average experience"²⁷ was a tendency of that sophistical day. Thus the Athenians would unconsciously identify themselves with him in his opposition; indeed, even as the modern reader is inclined to oppose from the beginning the imperious demands of the god. If this is so, we can say that Euripides meant the spectacle of Pentheus as a lesson for the Athenians. Therefore, we should say

 26 Cf. also vv. 395, 6; 426, ff; 884, ff; 1341, ff; Dodds, xl-xli.

27 Dodds, ibid.

He did not mean especially to recommend the wisdom of Pentheus, for, after all, this is what earned him his death. Rather, Euripides was telling them to adopt what means they could to avoid the dilemma with which the king was faced: a choice between unreasoning submission or ruin.

The Bacchae for all its lyric beauty ends up as a horrid and ghastly spectacle, the tale of the irrational domination of religion. Euripides, it is certain, did not sympathize with such a tyranny of religion; nor, yet, because of its tyrannous character would he advocate throwing out religion entirely. This we know from his other plays and the spirit of his criticism in them. On the other hand, he could not be expected to sympathize with those who, like Cadmus and Teiresias, paid immediate homage to this tyranny. Where, then, does he stand? We must answer that he stands with reform.

The significant difference between the Athenians and Pentheus is that the former still had a chance to do something about their fate. The power of Dionysus absolutely submerged the king. The power of religion—tyrannous and irrational religion—need not overwhelm the Athenians, too. If they wished, such a tyrant was in their power; in that regard, at least, in which he was a tyrant. They could

successfully prevent the tyranny of religion, not necessarily by overcoming the faults of Pentheus in themselves, but by using his one virtue. By sane rationalization, they could hope to strip contemporary religion of its irrationality. If Euripides encouraged them to feel with Pentheus, it was that they might have a fervent desire of avoiding his fate, of avoiding the decision he had to make. And the one thing they could do was the very thing Euripides himself was doing: purifying Greek religion of its irrational and unworthy elements.

This is the meaning of the Bacchae. It is the poet's last effort to enter heart and soul into the task of the enlightenment he thought so necessary in religious matters. In this play, he does not attack any certain legend or dogma. He strives to give a final motive to the Athenians. In religion (and likewise, by implication, in their outmoded mythology, their ridiculous tales of divinities more human than themselves, in their headlong, unreasonable, unreasoning, worship of the gods) the Athenians refused to be intelligent. Like Teiresias, they follow blindly, and blindly do they fall. Most of them have not the daring, even of Pentheus. Ἐνθεός, they hold to the traditions of their ancestors. The whole force of the tragedy, the horrible punishment of Pentheus for his resistance, the pathetic repentance of

Agave, is it not to show the Athenians what a tyrannous thing was religion as they had it? Is not this reflection forced upon even the modern reader? Subdue, then, this overweening tyrant, and strip this serpent of its poisonous fangs.

Viewed in this light, the Bacchae is, indeed, the crowning effort of Euripides' career. It is his final and supreme effort to purify Athenian belief. Hence, there is no difficulty in answering that it is far from being a palinode. What form this purge should take, he had indicated in his former plays. The playwright wanted his audience to be τοιοί. And to this virtue he could best hope to motivate them by dramatizing the ghastly effects of failing to cultivate it.

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The thesis submitted by **John E. Festle, S.J.** has been read and approved by three members of the Department of **Classical Languages.**

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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